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BLUE BOY

BY JACK SHARKEY



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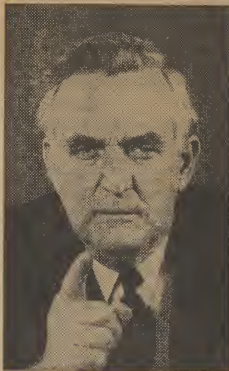
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Fact and Science Fiction

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stories

JANUARY, 1965
Vol. 39, No. 1

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MPA



editorial

THE full mystery of Stonehenge seems at last to have been solved. The nearly 4,000-year-old combination of stones, mounds and pits seem to have been—a computer!

Scientists have known for some time that the “main avenue” of Stonehenge, leading toward the solitary “heel stone”, marked the point of the sun’s rise at summer solstice. But the significance of the other stones, pits and mounds was not clarified until astrophysicist Dr. Gerald Hawkins discovered that, if one drew lines through certain of the key landmarks, one could pinpoint astronomically critical risings and settings of sun and moon.

The second major mystery of Stonehenge was the reason for the 56 equally-spaced pits that formed a circle—the so-called Aubrey holes. Another series of astronomical calculations showed that solar or lunar eclipses always occurred when the winter moon rose directly over Stone-

henge’s heel stone. This occurred at intervals of 18, 19, and 19 years—a total of 56 years. Thus, the Aubrey holes seem to be an ancient “computer” for predicting when an eclipse would occur. If a marker were to be moved from hole to hole each year, the Druidic priests would know which three holes would permit them to predict the event.

The mystery of Stonehenge was bound to be solved. And it is not surprising that the ancient sanctuary proves to be an astronomical guide. Perhaps the most fascinating thing about it all is that the solution was made possible by using one minute and forty seconds of modern computer time to calculate all possible positions and directions of sun- and moon-rise and set.

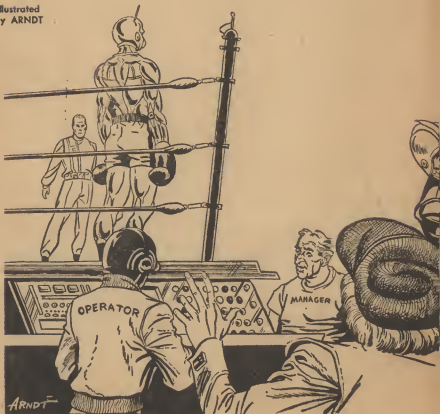
One wonders which is the greater miracle: that today’s computer could solve the ancient mystery? or that the ancient “computer” could have been devised in the first place? —NL

BLUE BOY

By JACK SHARKEY

The fight game is full of double-crosses.
But it's pretty hard to double-cross a
Plutonian who is just about to become
the champion of the world.

Illustrated
by ARNDT



I WANT it clearly understood that I do not place the blame *directly* upon the United States Space Academy for what happened on the night of the middle-weight championship fight at Goldwater Garden in New Manhattan this past week. But I think it only fair to point out that had I not suffered the legalized impressment known as Getting Drafted and placed under the USSA's dominion, the events which eventuated in the midst of the main event would not have. That is to say, if the USSA had allowed me, Michael Hanningan, to retain my status as a happy-go-lucky civilian citizen, the world would not be currently engaged in the sorriest clean-up

campaign in the history of civilized man (One would imagine that an organization of permanent career-men two hundred thousand strong could get along without grabbing up unwilling victims for things like polar duty on Uranus or sandbag-toting on Mars, but apparently military personnel-selectors are just plain insatiable. And not—since they selected me—very choosy, either.) I admit that all the business about the icechips, the JPs, and chopped-up lawn furniture *would* have happened without my help. But what happened in the Garden—!? I mean, the golden chance the USSA inadvertently handed me by—

Wait. Here is where it all first



begins: It is a chilly April morning in 2260 A.D., at 0930 hours, a typically bleak and misty dawn arriving on the archipelago-chain in the Pacific Ocean I have been calling home—and other things — for some thirty-two months when I see my name upon the fuzzy brown bulletin board outside the Orderly Room. That *my* name appears there, you understand, comes as no surprise to me, because what is posted upon this particular board by the Duty-clerk at 0915 each day is a list of the men who are being *exploited* in the immediate future. I am, however, startled to learn that—for the primal instance since my indenture into the service of the Land We Love (to Stay On; a big joke in boot camp)—I am to actually get off the ground and out into the cosmos.

That I am not thrilled by the news cannot be ascribed to an unpatriotic taint in my ethical makeup; it is just that I am well-read, and have compiled my own statistics proving that on interplanetary flights, where a vehicle is traveling roughly seven times faster than the passengers' screams of naked fear, and the interval between awareness of peril and the onset of that peril is somewhat less than an eye-blink, the less inexperience one has among the crew the more likely you will touch down with all hands not jellied upon the

bulkheads. In short, I do not feel safe on any flight on which I myself am along. At the same time, however, I realize that a declaration of this most urgent emotional complication to my immediate superior, Astronaut First Class Windmeier, is not likely to result in anything but an increase of the ill will which already exists between us, marring what would otherwise have been a merely intolerable relationship.

The one cheering note in the whole business is the site for which we are slated. It is the skimpily explored planet known as Pluto, and the duty-sheet lists it as being slightly greater than 35 hundred million miles from Terra. (Terra is the fancy name they have given Earth because too many jokes of the "What-on-Earth - are - you - doing?"—"Nothing,"—said - the - man - on-Mars nature have been perpetrated since the first moon landing in the 20th century.) A little quick mathematics shows me—even travelling at 50,000 miles an hour, *double* the necessary escape velocity, from our island base to Pluto—it would take us roughly 3000 days to make it. Which means that we will have to travel in hyperspace, which is fifteen times faster. And in hyperspace all animal life is kept in suspended animation because the first guy who went into it wide-awake came out sing-

ing nursery rhymes and built himself a dandy fortress out of empty food-concentrate boxes before they led him away. Something to do with time progression which brings on Instant Second Childhood to the waking mind. If the cause of my semi-elation is not yet clear, I will explain it thusly: At the time my name appears on the board, my four-year hitch has sixteen horrible months to run. Taking the Pluto jaunt means that better than fourteen of them will be spent unconscious, and that is the best way to approach military life that I know.

Especially in the company of AFC Windmeier.

BLASTOFF time is given as 1800 hours on the same day my name appears. All men upon the list are relieved of all duty until roll call (1730 hours), in order that they may pack their gear and still not have time to write their congressman for a stay of execution, because even by mail-rocket the letter would not arrive at the Capitol until the ship was beyond the Point Of No Return (which is roughly six inches above the atmosphere, at which point the space-warping drive is turned on and we are all bye-bye for two hundred eighteen days), and even by pooling all resources none of the men elected for the trip could come up with the price

of a phonecall to Washington III at our currently inadequate rate of pay, *if* we knew who our congressman was in the first place, and could think up a sound reason why we should not obey orders which have probably been voted in favor of by that selfsame governmental representative anyhow.

Being relieved of duty means that for the first time in weeks I will not have to send a buddy from whichever area of hard labor I am slated for to pick up my mail for me, a setup that warms my heart considerably since even the best of buddies have been known to mysteriously vanish from one's ken for weeks when one's incoming mail has included cartons of cigarettes or food packages from home. However, when I arrive at mail call and answer "Here!" to my name (the mail clerk finds my face is unfamiliar and I have to show my dogtags to prove who I am), all that has arrived for me from the states is a short note from Doc Willoughby, a down-and-damn-near-out fight promoter for whom I have acted as handler and sometime sparring partner whenever he has a likely prospect under his management. Doc's letter is short and not especially sweet.

"Dear Mickey," he salutes me, "It sorrows me to report that The Frisco Kid succumbed last night to a personal quake in the

region of his knees after going only two rounds with 'Bopster Benny' in the Santa Rosalia preliminaries, and has decided on the advice of his doctor to forego his career as a pummeler of men for the more staid, but physiologically safer, life of a grocery clerk in Tia Juana. Therefore it will not astound you to learn that the cash you so kindly made loan of to me over the past three months is no longer residing in any approachable pockets. I also need not to tell you that the price I might wheedle out of the local pawnshop merchants for the left-over gymshoes, mouthpiece and jumprope would hardly bring me enough profit to cover the cost of posting this letter to you. After your overgenerous kindness on the fiscal front in the past, I would not presume to request that you possibly forward any cash on hand to me in care of General Delivery, Quechico, New Mexico in order that I do not succumb to the internal effects of having nothing in my stomach since yesterday noon upon the hardwood bench at the railway platform I have come to look upon as my temporary home. However, if you could spare a little something, my gratitude, under the circumstances, could be nothing if not abject." It is undersigned, "Your friend and sincere well-wisher, Hanford J. 'Doc' Wiloughby."

Even the most cursory reading evinces to me that a note of destitute desperation shimmers in delicate undercurrent between the lines, so before I roll my bedding for its return to the supply room I stuff all my ready cash into an envelope and post it to Quechico, then hasten to bid farewell to a chum in the paymaster's office and manage to cook up a deal whereby he will forward my monthly pay to Doc at his San Francisco address (a benevolence of which I have already informed Doc in the cash-carrying letter; depositing my pay in his own bank account will prove no problem since I have likewise, many months back, given him my power-of-attorney signature on a letter that could ruin me financially if I did not trust the old geezer to the ultimate and know he would not spend it upon foolish things like could-be boxing champions.) This accomplished, I manage to return all military material to the proper lending agencies on the base, pack my personal equipment, run like hell across the landing field, and arrive only two minutes late for roll call, a dereliction of duty which brings a wintry smile to the stern mouth of AFC Windmeier, and I know that if there are any ugly jobs to be done upon Pluto's frost-bitten hide I have just as sure as volunteered for them.

OF the trip itself I cannot tell you much except that the needle in which our medic keeps his narcosedatives looks slightly more deadly than a peccary-tusk and no doubt feels as bothersome tunneling into my left deltoid, which thanks to the military mind's penchant for prophylaxis already resembles an aerial map of a mortar range. Once this hollow fang is wrenched out of my flesh, I have approximately two seconds to fluff my pillow before my body assumes the temperature and mobility of a pink popsicle and I know no more until I am shaken rudely awake by AFC Windmeier and told to fall out in space suit and entrenchment pack in five minutes on the double, and when I do, I am either standing upon a rounded-off ice cube some 6500 miles in diameter or I am on the planet Pulto. I incline to the latter opinion because aside from awakening me, Windmeier has said nothing, and if we had missed our destination somehow he would have managed to fasten the guilt squarely on my shoulders.

"Men," comes the voice of Captain Derek Frisby over the earphones in my helmet, though I can see his lips moving behind the faceplate of his own, ten paces in front of our ranks in the cold blue-white glare of the ship's floodlights, "I wish to commend you all for volunteering for this

extremely hazardous mission—" At the sound of the present participle he employs, a warning bell clangors in my mind just three-and-a-half billion miles too late, but when I cast a glance at the plastene-protected face of AFC Windmeier he is gazing with inflexible nonchalance at Captain Frisby, and not by a muscle-twitch upon his gauntly repulsive features does he indicate awareness of the radiating waves of betrayed hate which are bathing him from my furious eyes. That he has lyingly added my name to the list of the doomed back on Terra I have no doubt. That any declaration of his duplicity to Captain Frisby at this time would alleviate my situation one whit I have plenty. Shanghaied or not, I have come far too many miles now for it to do me any good to drag my feet.

As the captain drones on, explaining our mission in the multi-detailed persiflage that in military circles passes for clarity, I indulge myself in a number of happy fantasies involving oxygen hoses, thermal ducts, waste-reclamation units and other vital adjuncts to a safely functioning space suit, all of which fantasies have either blithely happy or horrendously ghastly endings, depending upon whether one views them according to the outlook of Michael Hannigan or AFC Windmeier. I am just tingling with

rapture as my mind-self pounds jagged rocks down upon the gauntleted fingers of my betrayer while he pendulates helplessly over at least three miles of Pluto atmosphere founded upon an abyss-bottom of razor-keen stalagmites when a still-sensate area of my reverie-clouded retinae notices that Captain Frisby and AFC Windmeier are no longer alone in their sector of the flood light-cone (which cuts off so neatly at its outermost edges that we might as well be walled in by star flecked black glue).

THE newcomers are obviously indigenous to the planet, since they wear not only no space suits, but nothing else besides, and it takes no brains at all to see that they are not of Terran extraction, despite their somewhat-human configuration. In height they appear to be a near-uniform five-foot-nine, with bodies that look as though the owners took so many sinew-building courses that they stopped remembering to pause for nutrition three times a day. (What the "day" is on Pluto turns out to be the aim of our mission; that is, if our lonesome little platoon can plot the length of a Pluto-day compared to a Terra-day, it is going to make a lot of astronomers extremely happy for some reason which escapes me. Apparently not satisfied with knowing

that it moves once around the sun every 250 years or so, the star-gazer set back home must possess likewise its rate of axial velocity or sob themselves to sleep over the insouciant little interrogation-mark on Page 9 in "The Astrigator's Guide to the Solar System".) To dispel any lingering notion that they might just be human beings whose flesh turned blue from the lack of sunshine in Pluto's near-Absolute Zero climes, the newcomers bear one and all upon their cranial apexes waggly blue-white growth, in appearance somewhere between a dandelion-stalk minus its blossom and a pet earthworm standing on tail-tip to cajole another *Mulch Munchy* from his owner's economy five-pound box. Even in my civilian profession I have not encountered ear-exterior so bad as these azure mounds which resemble the wrong-side-out surface of baby-bottle nipples, but the single aspect of the upcreeping arrivals which most rivets and fascinates my gaze is their faces: between eyes glittering like polished anthracite from bulging, triple-thickness lids, there juts a veritable muzzle of a nose, its flattened tip centrally perforated by a gumball-sized hole, its jawless, mouthless underside underslung by at least three ripples of plump blue jowl. For the first time in my military career, I realize that in the un-

tapped infinitude of the universe it is possible to encounter a face more repellent than that of AFC Windmeier!

All this visual information, of course, takes me but a scant moment to absorb as I pluck my thoughts reluctantly back from their morbid delectations of Windmeier's varied demises. From a palpably electric intensifying something-or-other in the non-air around me, I know that my fellow-troops, too, have witnessed the beginnings of this untoward visitation, but from my own petrified gaze at our leader and his go-between I know that they—as yet—have not. Why none of us interrupts Captain Frisby's speech to sound a note of warning over the helmet-phones I do not know. It may be that the sight has frozen us where we stand, or that the clutch of cosmic cold upon our space-suited bodies has done the same, or even that we are soldiers at Attention and no one in authority has put us At Ease. Whatever the reason, we remain motionless and watch the strange tableau unfold before us while Captain Frisby's words buzz unheeded in our earphones as Pluto sails silently through the inky night.

There are roughly two dozen of the blue-skinned things in view, now, and Frisby's tone of address is just warming to the despite-danger - and - privation - I -

know - you - will - not - fail - me - in - this - glorious - endeavor - men inflection with which he generally ends all speeches, even if he's only assigning us to a garbage-removal detail, when all at once Windmeier catches a glimpse of what's tiptoeing up behind the captain and interrupts his superior officer with a frantic warning cry of "Yowp!" Though he does not append the military prescribed "—sir!" to his message, Captain Frisby accepts the communication like a gentleman, refraining from the normally required lecture on The Proper Form of Address to an Officer as—turning his head slightly in the AFC's direction—his keen eyes detect the arriving personages to the rear of his second-in-command which Windmeier himself as yet has not spotted. In a *quid pro quo* demonstration that even a commissioned being is sometimes human enough to eschew the protocol of caste, Frisby returns the warning, reworded as "Yowp!" Frisby's drill-field training, however, put him some eighteen decibels ahead of Windmeier in sheer volume on the word, and the next thing of which I am aware—as I try futilely to clap my hands against ears they cannot attain through the rigid walls of the helmet—is that every last one of the approaching creatures has staggered and fallen to the rough-sur-

faced ice and is clutching at the wormstalk appendage with both hands, not unlike a Japanese hairhanging aerialist who has just discovered that his mode of suspension is giving him a hideous headache.

HOW the captain and the AFC negotiate the treacherous footing with such dispatch I do not quite have time to see, but when their overlapping commands that we surround and capture the apparently stunned invaders come tremulously over my earphones, the needle of the directional finder which is a part of the built-in indicator-panel just four inches in front of my chin within the helmet definitely indicates that both voices are arriving from behind us, barely short of the range-limits of their sending-sets. There is nothing for us to do but hustle the still-dazed blue creatures aboard the ship and install them in the brig, overcrowding the facilities there somewhat, but the consensus among the troops is that it lessens our *own* likelihood of arriving back upon Terra in irons, since a good military superior seldom orders the arrest of a subordinate whom he cannot immediately have stashed away beyond the reach of vengeance. We are therefore in the nearest a draftee can approach to a jolly mood when we respond to Windmeier's

command over the ship's intercom that we all congregate in the Briefing Cabin to hear Captain Frisby's analysis of the situation.

It is unwontedly brief and to the point; divested of subterfuge, euphemism and semantic evasion, his analysis is: "I'm a rotation-clocker, not a cosmic commando! Nobody *told* me it would be dangerous out here, and until the Academy has an armada of heavy-duty battle cruisers orbitting Pluto to keep the peace, I don't want any part of it, so as soon as I gauge the rotational rate from the safety of the port-hole in the control room, I'm taking the ship home!"

The cheer which follows his somewhat devious delivery of the foregoing (since he's tried to camouflage his actual emotional state behind dialectic dodges like "recalculation of objectives", "taking the initiative during a time of unprecedented crisis" and "careful evaluation of the unexpected precipitation of a Condition Red") informs him that he has fooled precisely nobody, but he manages to control his chagrin and simply dismiss us for the time being, because he cannot very well accuse us of *finding out* he is shaking in his boots without having to admit that such *is* the case. So we all find time for a few hands of poker in our barracks bay while he checks out the

Apparent Spin of the Polaris-pivoted dome overhead and thereby the planet's day-length. It turns out (via Frisby's weary-but-triumphant announcement over the intercom in less than an hour) that Pluto is neatly methodical in its relations with Terra: Already known to have roughly nine-tenths the diameter of Terra, nine-tenths surface gravity and escape velocity, and just over nine-tenths its density, the planet turns out to have close enough to nine-tenths the Terran day to make it a paragon of cosmic uniformity, at a nice neat twenty-one-point-five hours per complete twirl.

The announcement of our lickety-split completion of a mission involving incredible expense, titanic energies and nearly half a million man-hours (since each day under sedation is counted as a 24-hour duty-shift per man) is met with noticeably less enthusiasm than Frisby's penultimate speech in the Briefing Cabin, because now we are once again slated for a jolt of refrigerating fluid in those sabretoothed hypodermics again, in what seems—thanks to sedative-blocked memories—the second time in less than four hours.

Somehow, virgin flesh is located amid the craters on my left deltoid, and I have barely an instant in which to shriek about the complacent way my nerve-

endings are savoring every last morsel of agony when my limbs succumb once more to the scientifically induced Curse of The Werepopsicle and all is suddenly swept away for a sevenmonth of silence. . . .

It seems scarcely a heartbeat later when I am suddenly sitting up on my bunk with the eerie, instinctive notion that all is not well with the ship. My skin is a close-fitted mosaic of goosepimples, as though some primitive emotional sense has been appraised of rather shocking information which my normal five senses have not yet been able to detect. I sit where I am for awhile, looking, listening, and trying to think with my already apprehensive epidermis, but in a few moments the prickling of my flesh fades to smooth serenity again, and the nagging hangover-feeling of indistinct menace cannot be resurrected from my innermost mind.

I AM hopping down from my bunk to cover my body with something more substantial than underclothing when the door to the barracks bay bursts open and AFC Windmeier lurches in. Never have I seen the man in such a state of profound agitation, nor his garb so militarily incomplete, since he is clad in only his shorts, left sock, wristwatch and a stunningly executed red-and-green

tattoo of a holly wreath circumscribing his navel, over which I have just enough time to espy the words "Sea-Son's Greetings to Mother" (and recall Windmeier's rumored—till this moment—six-month transfer to ocean-going duty for failing to phone headquarters from his guard-post that he has just admitted the Secretary of Defense intent on a surprise inspection of the base on the morn of the base commander's slow recovery from the preceding evening's beer-drinking contest) when my erstwhile adversary is clutching my hands between perspiring fingers and babbling, "*Pirates! We're being boarded!*" I heard the magnagrapples hit the hull and someone's forcing the airlock from outside and Frisby's still asleep and he's the only one who knows the combination to the ship's arsenal and those damned blue things in the brig are all doing the jitterumba in unison!"

LOATH the man or not, I cannot let a fellow human being disintegrate before my eyes, so I hide the lump which is rising fast in my throat and blurt, authoritatively, "That's impossible!" The staunch intrepitude of my tone has its effect upon the AFC; he straightens up a bit, some of the shimmering madness leaves his eyes, and he asks, after about fifteen seconds of introspec-

tion blinking: "Which part?!"

"Why—uh—*any* of it!" I reply, the soothing note in my voice interpolated loudly by the onset of nervous hiccoughs. "Only a governmental agency could afford the high cost of running a pirate spaceship, Windemeier. There's hardly a cargo in the universe worth more than the cost of *fueling* such a ship. A crew who could get up the price of filling the tanks would be better off just spending *that* money—!" A dull clang at this moment comes echoing down the passage from the site of the airlock and all at once my hiccoughs have stopped, along with my heart, lungs, mind, and just about everything else in my body except the adrenal glands, which are now sending galvanic jolts through my system which will either start me functioning again or shock all organs into permanent inutility. And then I think, and say, "It can't be pirates. Pirates would open *both* locks to knock out resistance, and come in in space suits, wouldn't they? Even on a pirate ship's maiden voyage, some one aboard would have sense enough to think of that, and—" Extremely belatedly, my inner ear replays the final sector of Windmeier's initial expostulation, and I interrupt myself to query, "The *jitterumba*?! Those blue things with all those ropy muscles and vermiform topknots and jowled

muzzles are doing the jitterumba you said!?"

"I think so—" mumbles a trembling Windmeier, with less certainty of inflection. "It *looked* like— I mean— Well, it was *something* dancy, and their movements were all identical, and— And I know it wasn't a *waltz*."

Further speculation is precluded by the appearance in the doorway of the barracks bay (where my fellow-slumberers are now shaking groggy heads and yawning themselves awake) of a pair of space-suited men whose insignia identifies them as members of the USSA, and they seem as glad to see us as we them. "Thought the ship was a damned derelict!" explodes the foremost of the two, with the anger of heartfelt relief, and brings up the back of his gauntleted wrist with a clunk against the facepiece of his helmet, behind which his forehead perspiration drizzles unabated. "Dammit!" he snarls at himself, and undoes the visor. "Who the hell's in charge here?! This vessel was less than a thousand miles to *re-entry* when we managed to grapple with it! What's with your alarm bells? Why hasn't anybody answered our *Veer Off* signal? We've been broadcasting it constantly since your crummy hulk popped out of hyperspace! What the hell kind of a shiftless ship are you *running* here, Bud?!"

A dissheveled Captain Frisby chooses this moment to come waddling dizzily into the compartment, still tucking his shirt-tails into his trousers and trying with an ineffectually repeated toss of his head to get his forelock out of his immediate vision. "Windmeier!" he is roaring as he moves. "Where's that stupid —!?" He sees the two other men at this moment, and makes a valiant stab at protocol by going ramrod-stiff and saluting smartly, while his still-unbelted trousers slither to the floor. The spokesman of the newcomers just gapes, then goes to speak, then apparently decides the enlisted men's compartment is no place in which to excoriate a commissioned officer, and simply says, "Our ship is in readiness to evacuate you and your men as soon as you get your gear together, Captain."

"Evacuate?" echoes Frisby, pausing halfway in the act of retrieving his trousers. "But—? But *why*? What happened to our alarm system, anyhow? And why can't we land in our *own* ship?!" he adds, although something in his eyes does not wish to hear the answer to the questions posed by his voice, his eagerness paralleling that of an old lady on an ancient wagon train asking the trusty guide to translate the smokesignals rising from the surrounding hills.

"One answer should cover all your queries, sir," says the man in the space suit. "Landing-fins, fuel chamber, and the final ten feet of this ship's hull are *gone*. What cargo are you carrying—*Termites?*"

RECOLLECTION of our blue-skinned prisoners leaps across Frisby's face like a solar flare, then, and he shuts his eyes with an unhappy groan. "You know," he says to the man a weary moment later, "you may just *have* something there? . . ."

"You're just damned lucky you came out of hyperspace at *all*, Captain!" the man retorts, but his sense of righteousness is slowly giving way to sympathy for our woebegone commander. "Well—that can wait till we touch down on Terra. You'd best start getting your men together." Saluting briefly, he turns and leaves the compartment, and pretty soon we are all making ready to depart from our crippled ship.

It is while I am down in the galley sneaking a quick cup of coffee to take off the residue of the narcosedative chill from my bones that I decide to take a peep into the brig to see how much of Windmeier's jitterumba tale is true and how much is just chickenhearted Windmeier. A lucite port is set into the upper half of the hatch opening to the brig,

and it is through this that I see what the AFC was gibbering about. In solemn-faced unison the blue creatures are indeed approximating the hip-oscillating, finger-trucking stances of the jitterumba. Not in neat phalanxes like a well-trained gaggle of chorines, but individually—some facing this way, some that—each in his place, the creatures are jiggling and wiggling rhythmically amid the eerie soundlessness of the airless void which has replaced the air in the chamber via a ragged hole I can see in the side bulkhead if I lean my head quite far to one side. I am bemusing myself with the puzzle of what these mouthless creatures used to nibble through two inches of near-indestructible metal alloys when something familiar about their rhythm knocks all other random thoughts right out of the running.

The Plutonian prisoners are moving in Morse Code!

This is when I remember how Frisby's shout on airless Pluto has managed to reach and shake up the creatures quite thoroughly, through something connected with those pencil-thin skull-adornments of theirs, and I like wise remember the head of the boarding party informing all within earshot that a repeated *Veer Off* signal has been leaping through our sector of space at about the same time Windmeier

must have seen the Plutonians "dancing". Almost not remembering to breathe, then, I gaze upon these gaunt but leather-thewed individuals with eyes which begin to glaze with avarice as my mind mentally shrouds those loins in silk trunks and those feet in regulation ring-shoes. . . . One short-range sending set— A keyboard panel— A couple of hours haggling (a mere ritual haggling; fans are getting jaded, and the sport could use a new gimmick) with the boxing commissioner— Guaranteed free publicity when the prospect of a prizefighting Plutonian reaches the news media—! It is sure-fire! A shoo-in! A boat race! A natural! Not to mention a distinct financial saving with regard to supplying mouthpieces.

I am less than a yard away from the discovery of a lifetime! And I cannot reach a single one of the jiggling goldmines without the hydraulic ram I would need to pull open the hatch on the brig against the pressure of our ship's internal atmosphere. It is a situation which is in a short time going to make me sit down upon the metal deck and bang my head with painful repetition upon the bulkhead if some manner of overcoming this obstacle does not soon occur. . . .

IT is at this juncture that my ears inform me they have been

receiving no incoming stimulus for some time. The clump of boots and murmur of voices which has been continuous for a number of minutes is no longer with me. True, I have not heard the clang of the closing airlock, but should this event have transpired while I was contemplating the possible future of a brig-inmate in the prize ring I doubt that I would have been in a state of alertness sufficient to detect the sound of a carillon tower toppling through the roof of a large greenhouse if I had even happened to be *in* the tower at the time of the encounter.

Moving back down the passageway to the airlock I find that the outer door is closed snugly into place and that of the former group of companion soldiers there is no sign. I stand where I am and do some thinking. First of all, I am not absolutely abandoned; as soon as a ship of large enough accommodation can be located, there will without doubt be a group of men sent to remove the Plutonians for scientific scrutiny and intensive investigations down on Terra, since this is the first humanoid creature thus-far encountered in the confines of our solar system. Secondly, if roll call has not been taken by Windmeier before disembarkation—an oversight almost predictable, now that I harken back to his continued state of agitation since

the boarding—it may be yet awhile before I am missed, because the big brass down below will want to chew out Captain Frisby for not taking precautions against the loss of much ship-material, and shortly afterward Captain Frisby will want to chew out AFC Windmeier for not suggesting the taking of precautions against the loss, and only then will Windmeier begin to seek me out as the lowest common denominator of this soul-blistering Chain of Command, and until that time I am perfectly safe to make what plans I will, and already I have my plan in mind and am hurrying to put it into execution.

With the exception of one simple step, the scheme is a model of simplicity in scope. By donning my space suit once more, I can readily exit through the airlock, move aft to the site of the near-gaping side wall of the brig, garb the nearest Plutonian in my spare uniform, and then—by means of a retrorocket chest-pack and anti-pyrochute—deposit myself and the next middle weight champion of the world in any of a vast number of areas on the planet over which the crippled ship is now silently orbiting, leave the creature in the safe custody of Doc Willoughby, and then return post haste to the nearest USSA installation with a tale of abandoning ship when as-

suming I have been inadvertently left to perish thereon. Due to the semi-disastrous circumstances of my ship's arrival in Earth's vicinity, my story will be accepted without question; that is, they may *think* of some questions but they will not *ask* them, because a certain amount of amnesty accrues to being stranded in outer space, even if such situation is preponderantly imaginary. (I know my plan resembles dereliction of duty, but my conscience, after 46 months in the USSA archipelago in mid-Pacific, or at least under its egis, knows full well that the duty I am derelicting consists of little besides writing out detailed personal reports of the disaster and being allowed three days' recuperation-leave earned through emergency conditions adequately survived, and knows further that I will be back on duty long before my fellow-victims of the crippled ship return from their brief holiday, anyways, so no one gets hurt and everybody comes out ahead.)

THE single-step exception to my scheme, however, is one for which I do not have a ready-made poultice: How do I get a cable-sinewed world-champion-potential Plutonian to cooperate with me in the donning of my extra uniform, without which he will certainly attract notice? Even wearing dress gloves and regula-

tion sunglasses he will be showing enough blue skin to call attention to us unless we walk exclusively in the shadows, an area of peregrination I do not relish with only *people* about, let alone a superstrong extraterrestrial that can somehow bite, shove or etch its way through should-be-impregnable alloys.

In fact, I wonder as I check the final seal-offs of my space suit and start toward the airlock, how do I—whether he can be uniformed or not, singlehandedly—make sure that his friends will not decide it would be fun to pry the visor off my helmet while I am still trying to force those muscular blue arms into the sleeves of the gabardine blouse? And then I am wondering simply how I am going to enjoy spending the ensuing ten years of my life in a military prison as I come face to face with Astronaut First Class Windmeier at the very moment I open the outer hatch.

He is standing partially bent over, and I see that I have interrupted him in the act of undoing the hatch which I have just opened. He stands up straighter, looks at me in my space suit, looks at the retro-rocket pack I have cinched about my chest and at the anti-pyrochute buckled upon my back. "I am glad," he says, "that your tiny brain has learned *something* of rudimentary survival conduct while un-

der my—" Then he pauses with a frown as he takes in the rolled-up spare uniform and extra shoes which I have tucked beneath my arm. He opens his mouth to inquire as to this untoward patrol, and I decide that a diversion is in order.

"How do *you* happen to be here?" I ask very quickly. "I cannot believe that you were left behind accidentally. . . ." I realize too late that this statement, by implication, identifies Windmeier as the type who could only be left behind on purpose, but this unfortunate lapse into innuendo passes him by, luckily.

"I am here," he says sternly, "because roll call on the rescue ship showed me I was one man short, and Captain Frisby ordered me to return by damn-quick shoulder-jet and assure you that, as the aliens are still aboard, another ship would be arriving soon. Somehow, I am not convinced you were worried." Again, his eyes slide over my bundled clothing and a puzzled frown across his brow indicates the early appearance of what may prove to be a criminally embarrassing question. Then all at once a wildly what-the-hell feeling comes over me, and I am greatly surprised to find myself telling Astronaut First Class Windmeier nothing which is not the absolute truth of the situation.

When I am finished he is staring at me for a medium while through his plastene visor, and with breath which is definitely bated I await the words which shall either restore my confidence in miracles or Windmeier's competence with manacles. When he does speak, it is with a half-sold glitter of shrewdness in his eyes as he tilts his head slightly toward the vanished stern of the spaceship. "Are you certain that this thing can be done?" he says.

I RECALL that one of Windmeier's touted skills is the repair of complex radio-electronic devices, and as I mentally leech an unhappy hunk from Doc Willoughby's profits and my own, I say, "If it is possible to locate some person of the proper proficiency in the science of short-range signalling, yes. It will involve some practice in determining which waves will stimulate which pugilistic performances in the Plutonian potential, but this should prove to be no difficulty to any signal-specialist of over-average intelligence." This last bit I have uttered is what I hope will succeed as an egomassaging bribe to AFC Windmeier, on whose face I have time and time again noted excessive chagrin when Captain Frisby has been heaping endearments like "block-head", "numbskill" and "peanut-brain" upon his hapless hireling.

My pulse-rate leaps abruptly to a triumphant tempo as I witness the wistfully winsome upcurve which begins to affect the lateral regions of my listener's lips. In another moment, the gauntleted hand of Windmeier is claspng my own.

"We will have to make haste," he informs me as he leads the way toward the stern of the spaceship, "as that secondary ship shall be arriving at any moment."

As it turns out, my dubious reservations regarding the control and conduct of the blue-skinned creatures in the ship's brig is without foundation. By simply decreasing the power-output of our helmet-radios (lest the approaching spaceship overhear what might sound like madness on our parts), the AFC and myself achieve docility among the prisoners through our ceaseless singing aloud of a rather scurrilous barracks ballad, dominating what might otherwise be the defensive instincts in the amassed Plutonians and allowing them, instead, to do a rather sedate soft-shoe shuffle which interferes but little with our coordinated up-ending of the nearest creature in order to insert his lower limbs into footgear and uniform trousers. When we are finished, we are in the company of the sorriest-looking soldier it has ever been my privilege to espy, but at least

the floppy sagging of his cap conceals the unpleasant aspect of his ears, albeit we have finally to cut a hole in said cap with a penknife for the projection of his occipital antenna, which can be flexed slightly but not bent flush with the scalp.

"We will have to allow this thing to protrude," remarks Windmeier, allowing me meanwhile to continue the incapacitating chanty as a solo while we guide our toe-tapping comrade carefully out upon the exterior hull once more, where only the magnetic soles of our space suits keep our firmly grasped terpsichorean from doing a buck-and-wing into the cosmos. "I do not know how it may be disguised short of painting it the color of unruly hair, unless it is to glue a trio of feathers to the tip and identify our friend to inquiries as a victim of the first new Amerindian uprising in a number of centuries, except that a red-skinned warrior would not likely place an arrow through the center of a potential trophy." He pauses to take up the lyric in order that I may leave off and make reply.

"There is nothing for it," I say, "except to make a most judicious attempt to come to earth with my passenger as near to the city of San Francisco as is balistically feasible. It will involve my utilizing the retro-rockets in the approximate vicinity of west-

ern Australia, and I would not take it amiss if upon my departure you raise your voice in prayer that I do not alight in the central portions of the bay during the peak velocity of the outgoing tide."

Receiving his assurances, I wave farewell from the rim of the spaceship's rearmost remnant, take a firm clutch at the back of my blue-skinned buddy's belt, and jerk free the ignition-pin from the base of my chest-borne device.

A MOMENT later, I am rammed by what feels like a charging rhinoceros, and when I open the lids I have clamped around my eyeballs to prevent their being flattened upon my visor by the swift retrogression of the body to which they are so inadequately moored, I somehow still have hold of my wriggling passenger, and our vector—now that our motion is considerably suborbital—is already far below that of the ship, which is just visible as a short-lived sparkle before it dips behind the rising black arc of the Terran horizon. A painful impingement of the Plutonian's back-lashing heel upon my left shinbone reminds me that I have left off my licentious lullaby, and I rapidly return him to his sedate shuffle with a return to stanza forty-seven (unless I have lost count),

discard the husk of the once-shiny chest-pack, and wait patiently for the automatic blossoming of the anti-pyrochute, in its vast triple-tiered jolt-gentling expanse of sky-clutching concavity.

What Windmeier will report to the secondary ship about my non-availability as a rescue aboard the semi-derelict, I do not concern myself about, reasoning that any man who has survived more than a decade in military environs knows the prescribed format in which to deliver a snow job upon an interrogative superior, and the undeniable fact of my absence aboard ship will undoubtedly lend a note of credence to whatever fabrication he chooses to spin. My immediate concern is that our entry into the atmosphere will be slowed sufficiently to prevent my alien's clothing from catching fire before we reach the surface. I do not worry about the alien himself, since logic informs me that a creature which is not ravaged by exposure to absolute vacuum and additionally which can somehow make vanish a few dozen square yards of spaceship-alloy is probably not going to be bothered by a mere pummeling of high-speed gas molecules. My problem is that should the belt—its sole support—be no more, this alien creature will depart from me into the depths of the Pacific Ocean as I

am carried eastward by prevailing winds at a comfortably slower rate of descent, and all my machinations shall be for naught.

When the 'chute has finally spread its broad hemisphere over our heads, and I correctly identify a sparkling diamond-heap on the still-dark eastern horizon as the lights of the city of San Francisco, I am pleased to note that not only is the slightly oversize uniform still unscorched but that the Plutonian—despite the fact that my voice has been worked to a croak from overuse and is able to lilt no more—is writhing in strange contentment and quite unaggressive in temperament, now. I do not understand this reversal of mood even slightly at the time, but I am not one to look a gift Cadicruiser in the transistors, and concentrate instead on directing the 'chute into the eastern hills surrounding the amphitheater-shaped metropolis, being properly thankful that Doc Willoughby dwells near this fringe area and not deep in the heart of town.

MY companion's unwonted amiability continues beyond our somewhat bumpy landing, and he shows no desire to depart from me while I hurry the two of us into town and up the fire escape of Doc's hotel at a time dangerously near dawn, which breaks almost instantaneously in such a

mountainous region. It takes me something like fifteen minutes to shake Doc awake, which tardy alertness I attribute to a totally unfull bourbon bottle at his bedside. Then there is an interval of screaming which under less hurried circumstances (if I do not report to the nearest authorities at a time commensurate with my appearance upon the radar-screens of our western coast, I will have some accurate accounting to give of my interim whereabouts, a feat in which I wish to avoid displaying proficiency, if at all possible) would be found amusing. I cannot much blame Doc for reacting so frenziedly to the sight of a space-suited figure and a blue man with several unearthly attributes of appearance, but I do have to clap a hand over his mouth until my steadying words find their way to the brain-center controlling the terrified bulges that are his eyes, yet even as his ocular equipment returns to its proper place I do not remove my hand until he gives a promissory nod not to release his pent-up air with a cry of relief, because I wish to be down the fire escape and away without a large number of slumber-interrupted hotel guests leaning curiously out the building's rear windows.

"Mickey—!" says Doc with conspiratorial softness as my hand comes clear of his dentures,

"You're *sure* this blue person is actually there, and you are not trying to humor me by merely *pretending* to observe his presence in the room?"

"If you do not believe me, feel him," I suggest, but Doc's lips turn briefly bluer than the party under discussion and he says he would rather not, if it is all the same to me.

Quickly, then, I apprise him of all the salient points of the situation, emphasizing the necessity of radio-controlling the creature should its mood of amiability prove evanescent, for which purpose I will leave him my helmet, telling the authorities that it has been lost in transit someplace between my tumbled 'chute and the western tip of Australia. I also point out that, until the world has been informed of the visitation of blue-skinned aliens upon it, allowing our fistic find to be observed outside the hotel room is a contingency which is not to be condoned. If Doc himself must leave, I tell him, the helmet should be placed over Doc's bedside radio with the volume high enough to keep his guest dancing away the hours until Doc's return. As a parting remark I request that he attempt to learn how, and upon what, the Plutonian makes its diet, because judging by its apparent lack of energy-stores in the form of fat it would possibly make quick

work of a chore like dying of starvation. Doc delays my exit long enough to ask if the creature's garb may be employed for pawning purposes, and I give my assent readily, knowing that I have not the time to spare for removal of the garments, and likewise knowing that Doc would hock them permission or not and then concoct a convincing explanation for his perfidy at our next meeting, and then I am out the window and off down the street to surrender my body once again to the USSA for the duration of my thankfully shortening hitch.

THE remaining days in service do not go so badly as I envisioned, a great part of the unexpected painlessness due to AFC Windmeier's being somewhat in my thrall as a result of our esoteric partnership. In the few weeks that comprise my final tenure as a military man, I do not even once pull KP nor fail a single barracks inspection. For his own part, Windmeier has applied for two months' accrued leave-time, to commence on the selfsame date as my discharge, and spends his spare moments in swiping all the electronic equipment on which he can lay his hands, slowly and competently constructing a short-range sending-set which is knobbed, buttoned and toggleswitched to an extent that, he assures me, any

size or shape or intensity or combination of waves may be generated or varied by the merest flickering of well-trained fingers over the control panel. That he does not attempt to indoctrinate me into the intricacies of his device is immediately, and pointedly, noticeable to me, but I say nothing of his secretive scheming for two reasons: Knowing he knows more than I do gives Windmeier a great deal of the amiability which is making my last few days in the service undreamably pleasant ones, and it makes my head hurt to think of the informational cramming my brain would have to endure to attain any degree of adeptness at that incomprehensible machine in the first place.

Doc, of course, has been writing almost daily about his experimental progress with our aspiring champion, whom he has dubbed "Blue Boy" for professional purposes, a bit of aptly pertinent nomenclature with which nobody can possibly find a quarrel. "The reason for his gentled-down nature," Doc writes, "has become apparent to me quite by accident, and should have been a simple thing for you to reason out: Our planet is blanketed without cease by a near-infinity of television and radio programming, a fact which seemingly slipped your mind, Mickey. So that is the reason why our wave-

sensitive friend quieted his struggling shortly after you entered the atmosphere; he was receiving so many contrary signals at once that the end-product was total docility. He does, of course, react more strongly to waves in his immediate vicinity, as I found when following your advice on that helmet/radio combination en route to the bathroom at the end of the hall. The accident which clued me in to his docility was that my radio was playing a show which originates locally, and when I turned it off on coming back into the room I noticed that Blue Boy's feet continued to tap in the same pattern and tempo regardless. Have been lining up some preliminary matches for shortly after your date of discharge, so I hope your friend Windmeier can learn up on his boxing fast when you two arrive in town. I have naturally not informed the managers of Blue Boy's scheduled opponents further than giving his height and weight and age (the last I have arbitrarily conjured up as 23 years, in the absence of any information to the contrary), but the boxing commissioner—who is an old friend of proven reliability, having kept his mouth shut about a number of near-illegal happenings in the past—has been taken into our confidence, and promised to approve Blue Boy's application for qualification

as soon as we feel it is safe to admit we *have* a Plutonian . . .”

THIS last obstacle which Doc mentions is the one remaining barricade before the door to financial solvency, but it is satisfactorily overthrown just two days before my discharge, when the wife of the chief scientist in the group which has been examining the remainder of Plutonians brought down from the ship decides that these blue-skinned boys are “cute”, and—since the research teams have finally discovered what we have known for some time about the effect of radiating waves upon the Plutonian physique via that cranial antenna—she gives her husband no peace until he constructs a controlling device for her and allows her to move the Plutonian into their house as both a conversation-piece and a big help with the light housework. Her friends are soon browbeating their own spouses for one. By the time Windmeier and I have arrived in San Francisco, the Plutonian reproductive-method has likewise been solved, and housewives across the civilized world have started hag-riding their husbands for franchises on the junior aliens which will result. These demands, as it turns out, are not going to be awfully difficult to meet, since the Plutonian organs of generation are those circular

orifices which until now everybody has been mistaking for ears, and they have also turned out to be neuter of gender, producing offspring by the stimulating expedient (not unlike confusing frog-ovaries with X-ray bombardment, in that sheer shock-value produces the same results as good old-fashioned romance) of stuffing ice-chips into either opening, waiting around not much longer than one waits for the finished prints from a penny arcade photo-booth, and then ejecting a minuscule, but adult-proportioned, descendant out through the orifice in the proboscis. Not only is this a quick return on an inexpensive investment, but the Plutonian ability to repeat the performance seems to be without limit, and the offspring itself—when allowed ready access to large amounts of metal filings (devoured by the apparently double-duty organs which accepted the ice-chips) grows to adult size within one week, thereafter requiring an every-other-day bit of the same about the size of a corn-kernal for nutrition, an alimentary finding which explained what happens to the missing parts of our spaceship, adult Plutonians being equipped with jewel-hard fingernails which have served them in quarrying metallic ore back home and do not cavil at being used to chip away at a brig's bulkhead, either.

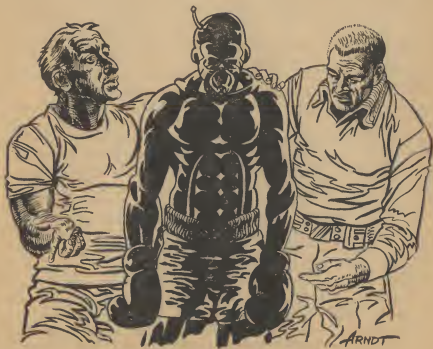
IN the six weeks it takes Windmeier to become adroit at controlling Blue Boy with his device, uncountable ice-chips have wended their way into Plutonian skulls, and incredible quantities of metal ingots and even items like chopped-up tubular-framed lawn furniture have nurtured many a puny *imago* into full-blown maturity, at which stage of development *his* "ears" (it's less embarrassing for people to use the locational in place of the actual term, it seems) are utilized to create cute little blue party-favors for deserving friends. None of this feverish activity is at all the goal of the research men back at the government laboratory, but even a dedicated bunch like that appreciates the warm glow of extra income, and so the JPs (as the Junior Plutonians come to be known) are peddled at a bargain rate of ten bucks per. The scientists realize that any commodity capable of self-generation cannot long bring a profit, but they intend to make the real dough selling control-boards, without which every last donated or black-marketed JP can be nothing more than a tractable blue idler, responsive to a tug at the arm, but not much else. If you want furniture dusted, groceries borne home without supervision, or even a friendly hand-shake in times of stress, you got to go out and buy yourself a

chrome-cluttered console called The Megamonitor. At five hundred bucks a throw.

Naturally, by the time of Blue Boy's first bout, his arrival at ringside does not cause more than a lot of interested speculation, his blue-skinned counterparts being commonplace sights in most localities these days. His opponent raises quite a stink, however, arguing that to enter the ring to try and punch a creature which can survive any brunt up to and including the impact of a steam locomotive (a fact which was a great selling-point of those JPs which have gone to homes where-

in the children have been known to break the spirit—and limbs—of pet gorillas) is tantamount to lending out one's head for use as a shock-absorber under a pile-driver.

He is still only half-convinced when we explain to him that Windmeier has a feedback-device which will register any blows landing upon Blue Boy, allowing the opponent to win on points alone if he knows his pugilism. Blue Boy, in turn, will be kept within bounds by a governor-mechanism which prevents his striking any more forcefully than the recorded might of middle-



weight champions from past years. This item of information brings a detectable pallor to the lad's face. However, when the fight-announcer reads aloud the letter from the boxing commissioner which lauds the fact that a knockout of a Plutonian is impossible, "... thus recovering the mantle of genuine sportsmanship for a contest which has for centuries been tainted by death, disfigurement and concussive idiocy," and the crowd begins taunting the opponent as a yellow-belly, the pallid lad ruefully makes his way to the proper corner and tries to look confident about the whole thing.

"Frankly," whispers Windmeier, fingers hovering over the panel as we await the bell, "I was afraid the *spectators* wouldn't buy the idea of a bloodless match, Hannigan. I thought most fight fans were supposed to come just in the hope of seeing some sap get his brains beat out."

"They do," I whisper back. "You are forgetting that it takes *two* to prizefight, Windmeier. Ever since Blue Boy started down the aisle I have been hearing customers busily switching loyalties and private bets to a certain blue figure in orange trunks—" The bell clangs, suddenly, so I leave off and sit back beside Doc Wiloughby, who is chewing the end of his ringside cigar furiously. He personally hates tobacco in

any form, but he feels a wet cigar is part of a fight-manager's public image.

UP in the ring, Blue Boy and his opponent are circling warily. Down before us, Windmeier's fingers are a blur of intense button-coordination, which he does by touch alone, since it is always necessary to keep his eyes upon Blue Boy lest the Plutonian's punches be thrown when the opponent is laughably out of reach. If the spectators at this primal match should get to laughing, the three of us could be embarrassed out of the business. Not a few of the spectators near our corner are more fascinated by the manipulative dexterities of Windmeier than by what is occurring up on the roped-off canvas arena. But a lusty roar which explodes from the myriad throats of the other observers instantly pulls all remaining gazes up to see the cause. Blue Boy's opponent has planted his Sunday punch squarely upon our man's muzzle, and Blue Boy's roundhouse response with his right fist has missed its target by a mile.

"Windmeier, for the love of —!" I rage, plunging forward to my knees beside him at the panel.

"My fingers are slippery," he groans miserably, dragging his left palm desperately across his

shirt-front while his right hand becomes a blur of increased activity. "I didn't figure on the crowd getting me so nervous—I think I've got stage fright, Han-nigan!" His semi-dried left returns to work as his right gets the same shirt-front treatment.

Another roar from the crowd jerks my head up. In the ring, a lurching Blue Boy has just connected with a violent uppercut to his own jowls and dropped flat on his orange-silk behind onto the canvas. The referee springs forward and starts the count, while the other boxer dances back and forth in a neutral corner, his face in the grip of a dazed smile of unexpected triumph. "Windmeier!" I cry, and cover my eyes as the AFC—now more flustered than ever—hits about nineteen wrong buttons in a row, causing Blue Boy to do what could be a sensational bit of exotic dancing if he were not still seated on the canvas. The bell clangs on the count of nine, and as soon as Windmeier manages to send Blue Boy into the corner above us, Doc and I spring to work with arm- and neck-massages, cold towel, water bottle and spit-bucket, like the manager and handler of the other boy are doing at their side of the ring, except that we are doing the pep-up job on AFC Windmeier. Blue Boy doesn't sweat.

The next round goes a lot better for maybe ninety seconds,

and then the increasingly pungent cloud of tobacco smoke in the room begins to work upon Windmeier's sensitive nasal passages, and just when Blue Boy has the other boxer lined up for a solid left jab our electronic expert nearly blasts himself backward off the chair with a veritable detonation of a sneeze; leaving the Plutonian abruptly standing with his gloves dropped to his sides, and the other guy gets in so many fast punches that the feedback-indicator on our machine can barely keep up with him. I see the numeral 35 in the totalizer-window when the opponent finally pauses to get his breath, and I want to crawl under the ring and quietly die.

Windmeier by this time has rocked forward to jab at the board again, but the sneeze has pivoted his chair just fractionally off-center, and like a touch-typist who by mischance places his fingers upon the wrong row, the AFC's efforts result in instant gibberish, except that in our case the gibberish is acted out in charade by Blue Boy. He enraptures the spectators for five interminable seconds by spreading his arms wide and deftly jumping the rope he is not holding while the other man brings the count in that little window to a ghastly 73, and then Windmeier gets hold of himself and backs Blue Boy out of range.

BY this time I am all out of epithets to scream at the AFC, and a lot of the crowd is laughing itself sick, and Doc is busily spitting wet grey ashes onto the floor due to his dazedly inserting his cigar into his mouth wrong end foremost during the rope-jumping episode. I am just wondering if life in the USSA was so bad, after all, and damned near beginning to feel nostalgic for that little old archipelago when I hear a noise like the crack of doom, and rock backward in time to see the iron globe which has just a moment ago been topping the post in the righthand corner of the ring go rolling right up the aisle to vanish through the exit. One look into the ring tells me what has happened. Blue Boy has missed with another roundhouse, but this one missed because his opponent managed to duck, not because he was out of range. This selfsame opponent is at the moment staring back and forth from Blue Boy to the shattered remnants of that thick metal post. Then his eyes go rolling up into his head, and he is crumpling in a dead faint to the canvas.

At this point the bell sounds again, but despite all that the other boxer's group attempts to do in the way of revival, that young man is still deep in shock when the bell sounds for Round Three, and it is a very dazed trio

of Blue Boy's faction that slowly realizes the Plutonian has just won the match. Without landing one lousy punch upon his adversary, too! It is the chagrin of this latter fact that makes Doc Willoughby declare that the fight game has gone to blazes and that he is tendering us his formal withdrawal from management of Blue Boy as soon as he can locate a pencil, but while he is still searching for one the man arrives with the winner's share of the gate, and this is a sight which Doc has not seen in so many years that he avers he will perhaps remain in our partnership a little bit longer.

From that point on, things begin to improve for us. Windmeier begins to enjoy the curious stares of the crowd, his stage fright fades away, Blue Boy begins to evince a great degree of finesse in his encounters, and by a series of long talks with various USSA authorities (plus a promise of free tickets to future fights) we are able to talk a temporary hardship-discharge out of them for Windmeier, who is just as glad if he never goes back what with the way the money is rolling in these days, but a kind of innate prudence has caused him to keep the separation "temporary". It is, of course, a non-duty, no-pay sort of tenure, but I have to admire the man's foresighted machinations.

From fight to fight, Blue Boy improves vastly, and has the not unenviable record of all wins, no losses, which is making him the greatest draw ever in the business. By now, of course, the crowds are motivated differently. As with any person who evinces nothing but perfection to the public eye, a state of being which the average man resents observing, Blue Boy is now the contender whom every increasing mob of spectators is hoping will get his block knocked off.

The days and weeks go barreling by, and all at once it is the night of nights: the world championship, in Goldwater Garden. This spectacularly large arena has been sold out for over a month, and all the illegal betting—of which we three already have a large piece—is heavily against Punjab Hakim, the incumbent title-holder, whose handlers keep insisting to the press that "Punjy will clobber him!" while Hakim himself holds a rigid smile upon a face which is gray and perspiring.

IT is upon a front-page photograph of this face that Doc, Windmeier, and myself are gazing, while Blue Boy sits with a vacuous stare upon the rubdown-table he does not need, when a light rap sounds at the dressing room door. I confess we have all been chuckling at the discomfort

of the not-for-long-*now* champion, and since this is considered poor sportsmanship in most circles, we control our convulsions while Doc opens the door to the long grey corridor which will lead us soon toward what must be inevitable triumph. I am very surprised to see our caller, because it is Punjab Hakim himself.

"I—" mumbles the once-proud voice of this famous man, who looks slightly shriveled of height as he hesitates there in his red silk robe, his hands already taped but as yet minus the protective gloves which most people mistakenly imagine are padded to protect a body from a fist, instead of vice-versa. "Mr. Hannigan, I thought I would just like to—to stop by and shake hands with Blue Boy so he will know there are no hard feelings, no matter who wins. If it's all right."

A little saddened at the depths of humility to which this formerly flamboyant personage has toppled, I do not even smile once as I gesture him into the room. He goes to Blue Boy and takes the flaccid blue hand in his own, pumping it solemnly up and down. "I wish you good luck tonight," says Punjab Hakim. Blue Boy, naturally, does not reply.

Turning to Doc, Punjab astounds us slightly by saying, "That is a fine boy you have there

Willoughby. You have always been a manager I admired highly. You are a credit to the fight game." Doc's jaw just drops open, and for a moment he can say nothing as his hand mechanically returns the other's fervent clasp.

Then he mumbles, "Why—thanks . . .", almost guiltily.

I am likewise rendered speechless when Punjab grips my hand along with the words, "In all my years, Hannigan, I have never known a handler who so deserved the laurels his labors will reap tonight for him."

I choke out an indistinct mumbling noise, and I notice that Doc is blushing, and my face tells me I am doing the same. After all, when you have just been laughing at a man behind his back you do not somehow enjoy receiving earnest compliments from this man in such adoring profusion.

Windmeier's face is a study in half-hidden shame as he reaches out to accept the tribute of Hakim's handclasp, and the open-mouthed drop of his jaw is surpassing Doc's and my own combined as the champion says, "Tonight, sir, you will be achieving the financial status which few men deserve in life, and though it sounds foolish because you are the only known human being of your particular profession, I must add that I consider you the top man in your field."

Then, moving suddenly to the door, his head bowed, and a noise resembling the onset of a sobbing fit bursting from his mouth, Punjab Hakim dashes from the room. I go to close the door, and am surprised to hear the continuance of that sound just before it vanishes into the champion's dressing room halfway down the other wing of the corridor. It is more on the order of a wild chorle of unholy glee such as his Arabian ancestors are reported to have uttered when pouring boiling oil upon wall-scaling infidels.

"Why do you suppose—?" I begin, turning about. And then I notice that Windmeier is standing as if rooted to the floor, and his mouth, if anything, is open even wider. As with a strenuous effort of will, this mouth presses itself shut, and murmurs, "Muh — Muh— Mmm— My *hand!*" Doc and I almost collide noggin-to-noggin zeroing in upon this still-outstretched member at the end of Windmeier's right arm. It is reddish-whitish, extraordinarily swollen in size, and the positioning of the fingers looks horribly uncomfortable.

"It's broken!" gasps Doc Willoughby, a man staggered by devastatingly bad news. "All the time that Arabian rat was mealy-mouthing us with buttery compliments he was planning to blitz us with this rotten trick!"

A FIST pounds upon the door and a voice yells, "Five minutes!" The minor bouts have been completed. Blue Boy is about to fight for a world championship and the only man who can make him perform is currently half-swooning across the rubdown table while Doc Willoughby makes the merely token gesture of bringing the icewater bucket to plunge the ravaged member into. He does so, Windmeier makes a short bleating noise, and completes his unfinished swoon.

"I'll have to stop the fight—" I start to say, but a look at Doc's unhappy face stops me.

"You can't," he says simply. "Boxing regulations do not say that a fighter may postpone an engagement simply because one of his trainers is feeling poorly. If you cancel, Hakim gets the gate by default. And the New York boxing commissioner would be of no help because *he* is a close personal friend of *Hakim's* manager!"

"We— We could say Blue Boy is sick . . ." I falter, but I know this is futility. There are more than half a million Plutonians on the planet, now, and one of the joys of owning such a splendid servant is that they are impervious to any known disease, including fatigue. I sit down heavily on a chair and stare ahead of me with even more vacuity than our Plutonian prizefighter. The

smell of doom is in the air.

Doc has taken advantage of Windmeier's unconsciousness to apply an overlapping bracework of splints to the injured hand, and he is completing the knot on the last winding of supporting-tape when his patient comes to with a groan.

"It really happened, then!" observes Windmeier, staring at the amorphous globe of adhesive and gauze projecting from beneath his cuff. "I hoped it might be a nightmare . . ."

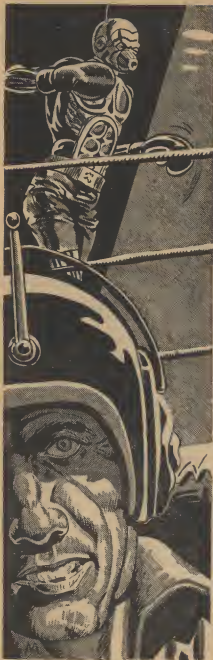
A sharp rap at the door is followed by a loud, "Blue Boy— You're *on!*", and the sound of departing footfalls.

"What'll we *do?*" I moan to no one in particular.

But Windmeier has straightened up with a steely gleam to his eye which I have never before seen there, and says, "We go out there and beat the living hell out of that rat."

"But your hand—" I expostulate, automatically opening the door before this relentlessly striding figure of cold vengeance, even as Doc shrugs and guides a docile Blue Boy out and down the corridor in our wake.

"I have handled our boy one-handed before, and I can do it again," says Windmeier as we emerge into the smokefilled basin of jam-packed humanity, at the base of which lies a rectangular glare of awaiting canvas arena.



"You have handled our boy *badly* one-handed before," I remind him as we trudge swiftly down through the yells and cheers of a hundred-thousand bloodthirsty throats, "and I don't want you to do *that* again. . . ."

"Tonight," says Windmeier, sitting authoritatively before the control board at ringside, "will be a night to remember, Hannigan, a night that will burn itself indelibly into the pages of recorded history!" Something in his tone demands belief, and I suddenly know he is right, and I sit down beside Doc and shakily light the old geezer's cigar for him.

"You heard?" I ask.

"I heard," he nods. "And I am all at once awfully afraid of what may happen. Afraid enough even to return the receipts."

"We haven't won them yet," I point out.

"Will we ever, I wonder?" says Doc Willoughby, and then the bell issues its brazen summons, and Blue Boy and Punjab Hakim—their middle-of-ring handshake and ritual instructions from the referee having passed unnoticed by my agitated mind—are charging straight across the canvas at one another. I look toward Windmeier, then look away again. Never do I see such a determined set to a man's jawline, such pain-filled, hateclogged eyes, such incredibly moving fin-

gers of a human left hand. I can not stand it.

At mid-ring the titans are clashing. I do not like the way the fight is progressing. Hakim is fast, and desperate. He has thus far evaded every punch which Blue Boy throws, and a few of his own have rocked our fighter, who—strong as a Hercules or not—must necessarily obey the laws of leverage when his vertical body is struck in its topmost areas. I know that Hakim will tire soon of his furious pace. But so will Windmeier. It looks as though half the television cameras in the world are clustered before the ringside seats, and not a few of them take time out to record for the billion viewers around the planet the magnificent symphony of eye-startling motion that is Windmeier's left hand.

Then some damn fool trying to get an arty angle on things his camera askew, and the trailing power-cable jerks Windmeier's chair to one side. Cursing like a wild man, he lunges for the board again, but Blue Boy's arms have dropped to his sides, and that is when the world-famed fist of Punjab Hakim connects with the end of the Plutonian's muzzle. The next thing I know, Doc Willoughby and myself are pulling ourselves out from under our fighter's sprawled figure, and in the ring Punjab Hakim is spit-

ting out his mouthpiece with raucous mirth from the neutral corner. The count has begun, but the bell saves us. I help Doc get Blue Boy back into the ring. He is naturally still in perfect shape, but as I come back down I see that Windmeier is unashamedly weeping.

"Do not take it so hard," I say, bending over the huddled figure before the control board. "After all, there will be other fights and—" That is when I see what Windmeier is doing, under cover of his hunch. His agile fingers have dipped inside a metal access-panel, and I recognize the item which he slips inside his blouse because I was with him when he first added it to the device. It is the governor which has been holding Blue Boy's potential to a human maximum since his first bout. "Windmeier—" comes a horrified whisper from between my suddenly cold lips.

"Get - away - from - me - and - keep-your-mouth-shut!" grates the man between teeth clenched so tightly I wonder that they do not shower his immediate vista with sparks. I am still wondering what to say or do or think when the bell sounds again, and a cautious, but smirking, Punjab Hakim is making for the waiting figure of Blue Boy. I recall the iron post which has been snapped with only human ability, and wonder crazily if Hakim's head

is as securely bound to his thick neck.

But Windmeier is not, I see, going to content himself with such swift vengeance. He is going to let Hakim know what is coming, in those last terrifying moments before the irresistible Plutonian fist strikes. For Blue Boy is moving forward on steady, floor-thumping feet, leaning into every frantic punch Hakim can throw, his quivering left fist pulled back in the one punch his mentor intends him to throw. The thud-thud-thud of those ominous footfalls have begun to echo through the garden, now, and suddenly all throats in that vast edifice fall silent, until nothing but the thud-thud-thud of approaching destruction can be heard. Hakim's own hands have dropped, now, and he is backing away, his eyes like white globes of mindless fright. His head goes left and right in an unspoken *no - this - can't - be - happening* movement, but his eyes never leave the gleaming blue face of his approaching doom— And then he breaks, turns away with a choking bellow of terror that flings his sputum-flecked mouthpiece into the air, and screaming like a woman he is trying to clamber up and over the ropes in his own corner. That is where Blue Boy catches up with him.

The next sequence of events is utter confusion. All at once

and the same time I am hearing one of the television technicians shouting something incomprehensible that yet comes across as a warning, my nose is choked with a terrible reek of smoldering electrical insulation, and the sight of Punjab Hakim wriggling like a frantic fish etches itself upon my eyes. . . . Blue Boy is holding the squealing Arabian aloft—high aloft beneath the burning lights for a giddy timeless moment— And then the Plutonian throws him down.

Straight down. Straight through the canvas and the hardwood boards beneath, with a crack like cannon-fire. The cement floor leaps beneath my feet, and I see that a jagged crack, inches wide, has snaked from beneath the unseen center of the building beneath the ring, and I do not like to dwell upon the probable state of Hakim's health at this particular moment.

Only then do I hear the continuing holler of triumph which has for a short while been erupting from Windmeier's throat as he stands before his control board swaying madly from side to side. . . . The control board which I see is a glowing red travesty of itself, belching smoke from its power-wielding innards, radiating a wave of raw heat that staggers me backward over Doc's extended legs and onto the floor—

And that is when the panel ex-

plodes like a bomb, and the entire arena is flooded with howling blackness.

The aftermath of the story you know, of course.

All about how that trailing cable shorted itself into the field of Windmeier's device, and how in every city across the world the ordinarily short-range waves reached out and took hold of the multitudes of slave-Plutonians, flooded them with the hate which Windmeier was keying into his board, and set them upon a rampage of destruction which shattered buildings, property, and not a few slave-owners' skulls, and occasioned the first time since Marconi that virtually every broadcasting station on the planet burst its insulation and went silent.

In the silence, of course, the minds of the Plutonians were freed from their enforced immobility. And driven by the memory of long months of maddening servitude, they were not slow in turning the tables.

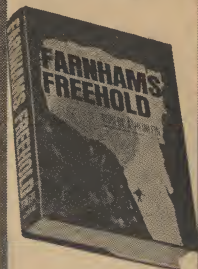
Working as servants to the Plutonians is damnably exhausting stuff.

But I think I wish—most of all—that when I was being interrogated about my domestic abilities I hadn't mentioned my USSA career at KP. I'm on it again.

And this time it looks somewhat permanent.

THE END

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A Child of Mind

By NORMAN SPINRAD

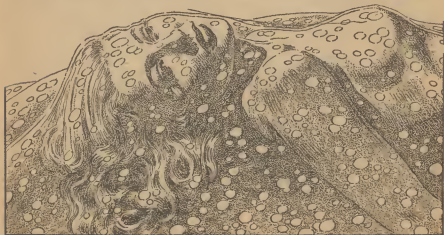
Illustrated by FINLAY

*The trouble with perfection is that it
tends to drive out imperfection. Another trouble
with perfection is that it is often
just another word for death.*

DOUG KELTON awoke in the middle of the night with the leaf branches creaking in the forest like the rigging of a great sailing ship; with the sweet modulated whistles of the piperlizards saluting the twin moons; with a landcroc cooing somewhere deeper within the forest.

He stretched the muscles of his naked body minutely, one by one, careful not to awaken the sleeping woman whose limbs were intertwined with his in the hammock. It was a time for aloneness.

He felt perfect breasts press and relax, press and relax





against his chest with the slow rhythm of her untroubled breathing. He brushed long silky strands of her hair from his face and inhaled the fragrance of her.

It was a light and perfumy smell, too perfect, too clean, too . . . antiseptic. A woman should not smell like that, a woman did not really smell like that, not after a night of lovemaking, not under less alien skies. . . .

He wondered how Blair's woman smelled, and Dexter's. He smirked wryly to himself. If he was any judge of men, Blair's woman would reek of fear and sweat mixed with crude perfume.

Dexter's woman would not smell at all.

Kelton found those dark, confused thoughts creeping up on him again, as he had every night for the past week or so. But there was something different about this night—he felt a decision forcing its way to the surface of his troubled mind. It was a decision he had tried so hard to avoid. . . .

Don't be a fool! he told himself. You've got everything here a man could ever want. A garden of a planet, warm, lush, full of food, without any real dangerous lifeforms. . . .

Nevertheless, he found his mind forming the cold steel image of the ship.

Idiot! The woman of your

dreams, the perfect mate, the ideal lover . . .

Dexter and Blair are happy! *They* don't have any trouble sleeping, they've got exactly what they want. *They* . . .

He imagined them with their women in the nearby huts, and his face soured. What had happened to Blair and Dexter was part of why he couldn't sleep.

Blair beat his woman at night. She, of course, loved it. She could not help loving it, just as she could not help enjoying being his slave during the day; serving him breakfast in his hammock in the morning; washing him; dressing him, shaving him and combing his hair; washing his feet at night and drying them using her own blond hair as a towel. Then the daily beating, and to bed. Kelton did not want to think of what Blair did to his woman then.

But he knew that she loved it, as she loved Blair. She loved every minute of it, every blow, every stupid petty indignity. She could not help loving it.

Blair, he could at least dimly understand. To him a woman was merely an animal, something to inflict his will upon to the greatest extent possible—not an uncommon attitude. The lower he made his woman, the higher he made himself. Blair was no monster. On Earth, under normal conditions, with a real wom-

an, he would be held in reasonable check by the force of her personality. But here . . .

Dexter was something else again.

Dexter was regressing, and it was horrible to watch. Dexter's woman woke him in the morning, gently but firmly, pushed him lovingly out of bed, made sure he washed, shaved and brushed his teeth, fed him a nutritious, well-balanced breakfast, a sensible light lunch and an over-indulgent supper. She made sure he got to bed at a reasonable hour and kept him from using the ship's alcohol and tobacco supply.

The thought of the two of them in bed made Kelton bilious. In a very real sense, Dexter was sleeping with the image of his mother. Kelton found it nauseating. He continually had the urge to kick Dexter's woman's teeth down her mealy-mouthed throat.

But, of course, Dexter loved every minute of it.

Kelton felt the woman stir sinuously in her sleep against him. It sent a tremor of pleasure shivering down his spine. Even in her sleep, she knew and played upon every nerve in his body. Making love with her was like playing two-part harmony with a virtuoso; like eating a custom-ordered meal from the finest robot-chef in the Galaxy. She really did know him better than he knew himself. And she loved him

quite literally with every fibre of her being.

It would be madness to leave her.

He stroked the small of her back moodily, and she quivered delightfully in her sleep.

It was greater madness to stay.

EVEN though the planet appeared to be a garden of a world, a real jackpot planet, they had played it by the book. Kelton landed the ship in a large clearing in a forest well south of the equator on the largest continent. Before leaving the ship, they enclosed it in a force-fence, and Blair did a complete atmospheric analysis, while Kelton checked the air for micro-organisms. The ship's robot was sent to scout the area for possible dangerous animals.

There was a saying among Survey men: "Planets are like women. It's not the ugly ones that are dangerous." Lathrop III had been a beautiful planet, and what had eventually happened there was one of the reasons that all Survey ships were now equipped with twenty "Planet Killers"—missiles with hundred-megaton cobalt and sodium jacketed warheads, the "dirtiest" bombs that man made.

But the air checked out perfect, the all-purpose antibiotics and viricides were more than a

match for the local micro-organisms, the robot ran into no trouble, and so, on the second day, they went outside.

There were several good reasons why a preliminary Survey team was always made up of three men. First of all, there were three basic specialties needed to make a preliminary evaluation of a planet: geology, ecology and xenology.

But more important, three was a stable number. There would always be a clear majority on any decision. No cliques could form, since the largest possible clique was two, and two was already a majority.

This planet showed no signs of intelligent life, so Blair, the team xenologist, could take it easy. Kelton, the ecologist and Dexter, the geologist, would make the reports that would determine whether this planet was worth a full-scale evaluation for colonization.

Kelton's first reaction to the planet was a happy sigh. The atmosphere had a slightly higher oxygen content than Earth's—just enough to make you feel great, without really making you giddy. It smelled clean and fragrant, the smell of growing things uncontaminated by smog, stale hydrocarbons, or any of the other inevitable atmospheric by-products of an industrial civilization.

Kelton felt like a kid in the country.

"Jackpot planet," said Larry Blair. "Ten thousand credit bonus."

"Don't you ever think of anything but money?" snapped Curt Dexter.

Blair leered at him. "There's only one other thing that's *worth* thinking about," he said, "and when you're cooped up in a Survey ship for six months, it isn't very healthy to dwell on *that*."

Dexter's answer was a scowl. Under ordinary circumstances, Blair and Dexter would probably get along pretty well. But when three men are isolated together for months on end, little things become big things, and friction is inevitable.

But all things considered, Kelton thought, it was a well-balanced team, and a planet like this was just the thing to loosen things up.

Kelton laughed. "Don't count your credits before they're caught, Larry. Just because there are no natives to throw the bull at doesn't mean that this planet's already been evaluated. *Some* of us have to work for a living."

That seemed to break the tension. Even Dexter was smiling.

"Okay, peasants," Blair said. "Curt, you dig for gold, and Doug can dig the animals. *I'll* supervise."

THE preliminary work went quite smoothly. Dexter took sample borings of the soil and substrata. Kelton collected specimens and took pictures. Blair helped out some.

The geological report was favorable. The planet's crust contained all the necessary metals for a potential colony's industrial base. Since the planet was rather young, there would be a shortage of fossil fuels, but radioactives were plentiful and coal and oil were far from necessities.

An ecological report, though, must be more detailed. It had been easy enough to determine that the biochemistry of the planet was close enough to Earth's so that the colonists would not have to import a Terran ecology. The local forms of life were quite edible.

But an ecologist must look for more subtle things. Survey records were full of reports on planets with Terrestrial biochemistry that were nevertheless marked off limits. Predators might be too efficient and too big, the local ecologies might be in such delicate balance that a colony would trigger planetwide catastrophe. On some planets, there were key organisms that, while deadly to humans, were also absolutely essential to the planet's food chains and could not be eliminated without destroying the planet's bioforms.

There didn't seem to be anything like that here, but . . .

Kelton checked the slides in the two microscopes again. *It could not be.* Yet there it was.

Two identical cell sections from two seemingly identical female piperlizards, the little insect-eaters which whistled so sweetly at night.

The two lizards were identical, organ for organ.

Yet the cells were different.

The differences were subtle, but under a good microscope, they were obvious. Two females of the same species, outwardly identical. But made up of two different kinds of protoplasm.

Just like the insects.

Just like the landcrops.

Just like every other organism on the planet that he had studied which was sexually differentiated.

Kelton scratched his head. Functionally speaking, the higher forms had the usual two sexes. But on a cellular level, there was . . . a third sex?

That wasn't the answer either. The males and . . . call it "female A", had identical cellular structure. But "female B" was different. The same species, but different protoplasm.

He grunted unhappily. He knew that it would be impossible to make a positive report until he figured it out. It was far too large an unknown factor. More

work was needed. Much more work. He'd have to do a statistical study. What percentage of the females were "type A" and what percentage "type B"?

More important, what did it mean?

There did seem to be a pattern. . . . The cells of the males and "female As" differed among the various species; that was to be expected.

But the "female Bs" of all species had the same cell structure and the same protoplasm.

It was as if they were different phases in the life cycle of the same organism. . . .

An organism that passed through reptile, insect and mammal stages? An organism that at various stages mimicked every other organism on the planet?

IT was beginning to rain. The fat drops of water pinged flatly on the great leafbranches that formed the roof and walls of the hut. It was a soft, gentle rain, peaceful, like most everything else on this planet.

Kelton sighed. It would be so easy to spend the rest of my life here, he thought. He felt the reassuring warmth of the woman in his arms. When you come right down to it, what chance would I ever have of finding another woman like her?

A real woman like her.

He tried to make himself

loathe her. She was an alien life-form. She wasn't even human. But it would take a good microscope to prove that.

He tried to picture the beginnings of her life: a formless puddle of protoplasm beneath a dead leafbranch on the forest floor. . . .

But it didn't work. When you came right down to it, all women, all men were born, in the last analysis, of amorphous slime. Did it really matter that others took form in wombs while the woman in his arms had sprung full-grown from a gigantic . . . call it a cocoon . . . ?

With her all-too-human arms around him, with her better-than-human odor enveloping him, it was hard for the biology of the situation to have any real meaning for Kelton.

He remembered finding that first teleplasm nest, under a dead leafbranch. His first reaction, despite his training as a biologist, had been disgust.

There were two stages of the stuff, there on the forest floor: a gray-green puddle of translucent, gelatine-like protoplasm about four feet in diameter; and around its periphery and speckling its surface, cysts, cocoons of various sizes, ranging from pea-size to the size of a large watermelon. It was obvious that the cocoons were made up of the same stuff as the glob.

Kelton radioed for the ship's robot, and twenty minutes later, the mechanism arrived—a caterpillar tank with ten boom-like arms, ending in assorted torches, cutters, scoops, borers and handlers. Kelton ordered the robot to transfer the thing on the ground intact to its specimen cage.

The robot cut a circle in the sod around the glob, about a foot and a half deep, with its cutter-arm. It then inserted a narrow torch-nozzle into the bottom of the groove, swiveled it so that it faced the center of the glob-bearing disc of sod, and under-cut the disc with it. It slipped four handlers under the disc, and lifted it gently through the opening on its back, with the glob still on the sod disc, like a suckling pig on a platter.

Kelton rode the robot back to the ship.

"What in hell is that?" grunted Larry Blair, wrinkling his nose at the glob installed in the specimen cage. "It looks like a dish of jello with an acute case of hives."

"I'm not sure yet," said Kelton. "But it may be the fly in this planet's ointment."

"Huh?"

"Remember when I told you about there being two kinds of females on this planet, type A and type B?"

"Yeah. So . . .?"

"Well, I did a cell section on

one of those cocoons. It turned out to be female B protoplasm."

"So what? So it's a *female B* dish of jello with hives."

"Guess what was inside the cocoon, Larry?"

"How should I know?" said Blair impatiently. "A kewpie-doll?"

"A female B piperlizard."

Blair goggled. "Huh? You mean that thing hatches out the piperlizards?"

Kelton gestured uneasily at the cocoon covered glob. "Not just piperlizards, Larry," he said. "Insects. Watersnakes. Leaf-birds. Landcrops. Dozens of different species in those cocoons. Every one of them female B."

"I don't get it."

Kelton grimaced. "Don't feel too bad, Larry. *I'm* the ecologist, and I don't know if I get it either. All I have is a half-baked theory. Let's suppose that life started out on this planet as on all other planets—thousands of different species. Then, somehow, something new mutates under this particular sun. A different kind of organism, formless, amorphous like an amoeba, but not microscopic, it's *big*. It has to carve out an ecological niche for itself. It's not a predator. It isn't really a parasite. It isn't a symbiote. First, maybe it starts out mimicking things. Simple organisms. Then there's a new mutation, and the thing becomes

... not sentient, but *aware* crudely telepathic, but on a *cellular* level. Call the stuff *teleplasm* now. An entirely different form of life, a new kind of *proto-plasm*."

"You're starting to make me a little sick," said Blair. And he didn't seem to be kidding.

"I don't blame you. This stuff is more than an alien lifeform. It's a whole different concept of life itself. The teleplasm becomes *aware* of other organisms, on a cellular level, on an organic level. Like all organisms, it must compete for food and living space. But in a weird new way. It's amorphous, without a form of its own. It takes the form of organisms around it. Piperlizards. Landcroc. *Anything*. It has the ability to imitate any lifeform, organ for organ. Now remember, the teleplasm is competing for food. How can it make an easy living?"

"How should I know? I'm no dish of jello."

"Who pays for a wife's meals?"

"Her husband, of— *Oh my God!*"

"Yeah, Larry. That's it. Type B females are teleplasm. They begin life as a glob of goo. Then a male organism blunders by, and the teleplasm somehow 'reads' its image of an ideal mate and imprints the pattern on a part of itself. It forms a co-

coon. When the cocoon opens, there's a female insect or landcroc or piperlizard. A type B female. And there's another wrinkle. The type B females are *better* than the natural type As. Before I found the teleplasm, I did a statistical study of the females in this area. *Seventy percent are type B*. The teleplasm is pushing the natural females out."

"Why?"

"Because the teleplasm forms females from the ideal images it gets from the males."

"You mean it sort of custom-builds females to order for the males?"

"That's more or less it. And seven out of ten males seem to prefer 'Brand B'."

"Wow! Hey, too bad it won't work for us!" laughed Blair. "All we'd have to do is concentrate on dreaming up the sexiest dames in the Galaxy, and presto! Out they hatch!"

For the next few days, Blair got plenty of laughs out of that, especially when he tried to needle the dour Dexter into revealing what kind of woman *he'd* be likely to order up from the teleplasm.

But two weeks later, when all the cocoons had hatched out, and the remainder of the teleplasm began to grow and grow, and finally formed three great human-sized cocoons, it stopped being funny.

THE brief shower was over, and a cooling breeze set the huge leafbranches of the sailtrees to creaking and groaning. Ordinarily, it was a sound to lull a man back to sleep. . . .

But Kelton knew that he would not sleep again that night. He somehow sensed that this was the night when all his vague uneasiness, all his sense of *wrongness* would coalesce into a decision. The time of temporizing was over.

And deep within him, he already knew what that decision must be, though he refused to admit it to himself, as yet.

Just as the three of them had *known* what waited in those cocoons to be born, long before they hatched. . . .

And when the day finally came, when the cocoon casings began to crack and warp and shrivel, the three of them waited numbly together by the specimen cage, afraid even to think. . . .

Life stirred within the cocoons, stirred and tore at the shriveled envelopes and struggled to be born.

"Should . . . shouldn't we cut them out?" whispered Dexter.

"No," hissed Kelton, with a ferocity that surprised even himself. "I mean . . . I don't think it would be *right*."

"Doug, do you really think that there are . . . *women* in there?" asked Blair.

"Depends on your definition, Larry. But there's nothing in this area whose mates would be as big as those cocoons except *us*."

"But will they be intelligent?" said Dexter.

"Are *any* dames intelligent?" cracked Blair nervously.

"I don't know, Curt," said Kelton, ignoring Blair. "If the teleplasm is really telepathic, then our subconscious image of a woman should be completely reproduced, down to . . ."

The cocoons were parting. The creatures within them threw them aside and stood up.

The men gasped in unison.

One was a bosomy blond, with wide sensual hips and a submissive leer.

Another was dark, fully-built, with an older, calmer, more maternal face on her young-but-somehow-sedate body.

Kelton knew that the third one was his.

She was tall and swarthy, her body an ounce plumper than willowy. Wild black hair cascaded down her shoulders halfway to the small of her back. Her eyes were deep, deep green, large and elfin. They laughed by themselves, and promised things without names.

Her mouth was small, but the lips were full, pursed into a frame for tiny, white feral teeth that she licked sinuously with a small pink tongue.

Kelton felt something turn to liquid fire within him, and his knees began to quiver.

"Larry!" squealed the blond, and threw herself at Blair.

"Curt, little one," sighed the matronly beauty, and enveloped Dexter in a massive hug.

But Kelton barely noticed that his teammates were leaving with their women.

His woman was speaking to him in a voice that was black velvet.

"Hello, Douglas," she whispered. "You've been waiting all your life for me. And I for you."

She rumbled his hair with one perfect hand, and he knew that it was true.

Liquidly, she was in his arms, and he in hers, and her fingers danced a slow tattoo in the pit of his back, and her tongue caressed his knowingly, and her body sidled warm against him, and thought stopped.

THEY were lying in the grass at the edge of the forest. Kelton had only the most confused memories of the past few hours. They could not have spoken more than a dozen words to each other, but he knew that he was completely, totally, hopelessly in love with this strange, knowing creature.

She seemed to know every inch of his body as though it were her own; every sensitive area, every

little personal idiosyncrasy, the kind of things it should take a woman months to discover about a man: how he loved to have a woman's fingers dancing in the pit of his back, the particular rhythm of his lovemaking, the fact that he liked a woman to keep her eyes open when he kissed her. . . .

Everything.

He cradled her in his arms and inhaled her incredibly sweet perfume. A part of him knew that he was holding something not human, that this fey creature had been born in a cocoon in the specimen cage, that what he should be feeling was revulsion, self-disgust. . . .

But he could not feel it. His body would not accept the reality that this was not a woman, not the most perfect woman that he had ever known. . . .

"Child of my mind. . . ." he mumbled.

"What, Douglas?"

"I said 'child of my mind'. That's you, isn't it?"

She laughed musically. "What a pretty idea," she sighed. "A lovely way of thinking of it. Only I don't feel like a child." She giggled.

He propped himself up on one elbow and stared into her laughing face. "What *do* you feel like?" he said.

"What do you mean, Douglas?"

"I mean, do you understand

what . . . er . . . how you came to be. . . ."

She laughed, and kissed him gently on the lips and then on the nose.

"Poor Douglas," she said. "You don't have to worry about hurting me. I know I was not born like other women."

"Then . . . how were you born?"

"Well first, for many years, I was an idea in your mind, a hope, a dream, waiting to be born. I was what you wanted, I was a part of you. And then . . . a *something* happened, and I was made flesh. A dream became a real woman."

"Do you know how . . .?"

"Douglas! Douglas! I told you not to be afraid of hurting me! I know how I was born. From what you call 'teleplasm.' But I don't *feel* like teleplasm. I feel like a woman. A woman in love. I'm a woman down to the smallest detail. . . ." She giggled. "As you well know, darling. How am I different from other women? Under a microscope, perhaps? Do you plan to make love to me under a microscope?"

He laughed to break the mood. "Well, it *would* be *different*," he said.

"That's my Douglas! That's the man I know and love."

"You really do know me, don't you? Even though you're only a few hours old."

"But Douglas, in another way, I'm as old as you are, and I've known you all your life. I'm what you've always wanted in a woman, and part of what you want is a woman that knows and loves you completely. And now you have it. Now and always."

"I believe you," he said. "I really do. I don't quite understand, but I *believe*. It doesn't matter to you how you were born, does it?"

"No, Douglas. It doesn't matter what I *was*. What counts is what I am. A woman. Your woman, completely and forever."

He took her in his arms, and he kissed her, and once again, he was lost in that sweet madness, and thought stopped.

SOON it would be dawn, and in the light of this alien sun, he would have to act. Of the three men, he knew that he was the only one still capable of making a rational decision.

Theoretically, there was no captain on a Survey ship. It would be ridiculous to name one man official leader over a crew of two. But Survey teams were not put together randomly. Kelton was the most introspective of the three, the man with the most highly developed sense of responsibility, the dominant personality, and he knew it. He could be overruled by the other two, since his position of leadership was

purely unofficial. But he had been the leader, and Blair and Dexter tacitly acknowledged it.

But now, Kelton knew, they were no longer a team, but three isolated individuals. The things that had held them together—a job to do, a planet to return to—no longer had meaning.

Of the things that had made three men into a Survey team, only one was left—the ship. And it took only one man to run the ship, and all three members of a Survey team were always trained pilots.

But Blair and Dexter would no longer even go near the ship. Indeed, since that day when the women had emerged from the cocoons, they would hardly have anything to do with each other, or with Kelton. Why should they? Dealing with other independent personalities means conflict; it means that you will not always have your way. It means accommodation, compromise.

They've become like children, Kelton thought bitterly. Spoiled brats. They lay around their huts all day, and they have everything they want without lifting a finger, without even an argument. Blair's woman is his slave, and Dexter's is an indulgent mother. Why go back to a life that was less than perfect, to women that made demands, who had minds and drives of their own? They were both contented,

and they both planned to spend the rest of their lives here, on this garden of a planet, with their women.

Their perfect women.

It was a great mental effort, but Kelton had finally understood that Blair and Dexter's women *were* perfect, to them, even though they seemed to him like grotesque caricatures of what women should be to him. But then, the caricatures had been in their minds from the beginning: to Blair, a woman was something less than human, a slave who should be willing to cater to every whim of her lord and master; to Dexter, a woman was something more than human, the source of all satisfaction, all security, the fulfiller of all wants.

There could be no jealousy here. These women were formed to suit every taste and whim of their mates, however childish, however neurotic.

Swapping them would be like swapping toothbrushes.

KELTON knew that, if he wanted it, the ship was his. He could lift-off and leave them, and they wouldn't give a damn. They had no intention of going back to Earth anyway, and they could do nicely without him.

But why do I want to leave? I have the perfect woman too, don't I? To Blair, Woman is Slave. To Dexter, Woman is Mother. What

is Woman to me, that I'm not satisfied? It can't be that we can't . . . That was never important to me, personally.

And I only asked the question casually, in the first place. . . .

They had been walking in the cool forest, the great leafbranches swaying ponderously in the breeze, the sun filtering between them, dappling the forest floor with light, when he had asked her.

"No, Douglas," she answered softly. "We can't have children." She frowned. "Does it really matter that much to you?"

"No," he said quite truthfully. "I was really just curious. Scientific curiosity. After all, I am a biologist. How does the . . . er . . . how do you . . . ?"

She laughed warmly. "Douglas, must I always keep telling you that speaking about it doesn't hurt me? I know what I am, and I'm not ashamed. Why should I be?"

"I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about. I just want you to feel about it the way I do, for your own sake. To answer your question, I *don't* reproduce. Not in the way you think of it. When you are gone . . . er . . . I mean . . ."

"Now who's afraid to face the truth?" he said gently. "I've no illusion about being immortal. *When I die, then what?*"

She flushed. "When you . . . are no longer with me, I die, in a sense. In a way, it's a beautiful thought. I was born to love you, and when I no longer have you, I will no longer exist in the form that your love gave me. I'll dissolve back into teleplasm, with no memories and no regrets, until someone else, or something else, comes along, and . . ."

Somehow, it hurt him. The idea, not so much that she would outlive him, but that her protoplasm would become so many piperlizards, insects, or whatever else happened along after he was gone. For there would be no other men to form her protoplasm into a woman. He and Dexter and Blair were the only men who would ever see this planet. . . .

Or were they?

Kelton knew Survey doctrine. When a ship did not come back, it was searched for, and the search was not given up until it was found. It might take a year, or a decade, or a century, but Survey would find this planet. It was not a matter of altruism, or protecting its own; if a ship did not come back, it meant that *something* had kept it from returning, and Earth had to know what that something was, before it took more ships, or worse. That something might be a hostile intelligent race, or a deadly life-form, and Man might be in deadly danger without knowing it, if

Survey did not track down all lost ships.

What if they hadn't found out about Lathrop III in time?

Kelton knew that it was a certainty—other men would walk this surface of this planet, sooner or later. It was inevitable.

And for some unfathomable reason, the thought filled him with a nameless dread.

THE first red rays of dawn filtered through the leafy walls of the hut. Kelton knew that they would be flashing off the silvery hull of the ship. . . .

Paradise . . . the planet was literally paradise for a man. . . . He kissed his woman gently on the neck. Funny, he thought, none of us have given them names. Why?

He was beginning to understand. . . . The creature sleeping in his arms was not a woman, she was Woman as seen through the eyes of Man, she was *his* personal wish-fulfillment. Her whole life, quite literally, was *him*. She had no independent existence of her own. The proof of it was that when he was gone, she would cease to exist. . . .

And suddenly he understood why Dexter and Blair were completely content, and he was not. To Dexter, Woman was Mother. To Blair, Woman was Slave. Neither concept required that a woman have an independent existence.

But Kelton realized that to him, Woman had always been Mystery.

And a creature of his own mind could hold no mystery for him, only the unsatisfying illusion of it.

Though he loved her, though she loved him, though she was literally perfect, he knew that it could never be enough.

For another word for perfection was death.

Now he fully understood what he had only sensed before. He knew *why* the thought of other men walking this planet filled him with dread. *Seventy percent of the females on this planet were teleplasm. . . .*

The teleplasm was pushing out the real females, the females that produced children. . . .

Now he knew that it was not for himself that he had been afraid, but for the human race.

What would happen when men learned of this planet? What would happen when they took teleplasm back to Earth, as they inevitably would?

What would happen to the *real* women; the women who were more than a reflection of men's desire; the women who had minds and dreams and dreams and desires of their own?

Who would father the children of the human race?

How long would there *be* a human race?

He understood, and he knew what he had to do, but there was no comfort in it for him. It was a knife in his heart. For the creature sleeping in his arms knew only that she *felt* like a woman, that she loved him with every fibre of her being.

God help me! he thought forlornly, I love her too. . . .

But he knew what he had to do. Extinction for the human race was too high a price to pay for love. A price that would have to be paid by generations yet unborn, generations that would *never* be born unless. . . .

A part of him had known from the beginning, that the price of paradise was always too high, that if men had the choice, they would choose perfection over reality, even if it meant death in the long run.

And that choice must not be permitted to exist.

Carefully, inchwise, so as not to wake her, so that there need be no goodbys, he disengaged himself from her arms and got up. He dressed himself quickly, and, not daring to look back, he went to the ship.

Kelton put the ship into a ninety-minute polar orbit so that it would eventually pass over the entire planet.

For long minutes, he sat stonily in the pilot's chair, a flame-gun in his lap, staring at the soft green planet below him.

You can still change your mind, he kept thinking, you can still go back. . . .

And be the *other* kind of murderer. The murderer of the human race.

There was no way out. The teleplasm meant extinction for Mankind. Man and teleplasm could not share the same Galaxy. Other men had faced this decision before, with other lifeforms.

Survey had a nice neutral term for it: "Planetary Sterilization."

It had been done to Tau Ceti II. It had been done to Algol V. It had been done to Lathrop III. Every Survey ship was equipped to do a "Planetary Sterilization."

All he had to do was press the button. The ship's computer would fire the missiles at the proper times. The whole planet would be covered in a nice geometric pattern. Twenty cobalt-sodium warheads were more than enough for a planet of this size.

Forgive me, Blair! Forgive me, Dexter! Forgive me, child of my mind!

He knew that he would *never* be able to forgive himself.

He pushed the button.

THE END

Now that Ranger 7 has photographed the Moon from within a few feet, it seems even more incredible that an imaginative reporter could once have convinced the whole country that science had found . . .

the men in the moon

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

Illustrated by FINLAY

NEWS travelled slowly in the world of a hundred thirty years ago—so slowly we can hardly imagine it now. Today, a President speaks in Washington and television viewers in Paris and London and Vienna watch him speaking. It was not like that in 1835. When news was made in Europe, it took weeks for the United States to learn of it. When President Andrew Jackson signed a bill at the White House, a few days went by before anyone in such nearby cities as Philadelphia and New York found out about it.

In such a world, people depended heavily on their newspapers to inform them of current events—a “current event” being anything that had happened in recent weeks, months, or even years. On August 25, 1835, the

20,000 readers of the 2-year-old New York *Sun* were given a very startling story indeed: At long last, news of Sir John Herschel's scientific expedition to South Africa had reached the United States—and the *Sun* had a scoop on the story.

Herschel was one of the world's greatest astronomers. His father, Sir William Herschel, had been the leading astronomer of the eighteenth century; among his many achievements had been the discovery of the planet Uranus. William Herschel's only son, Sir John, had no new planets to his credit, but he had carried out an important survey of the stars of the northern hemisphere. In 1833, he set out for Capetown, South Africa, to study the stars of the southern hemisphere. He and his family arrived on Janu-



ary 15, 1834, for a stay of several years. By March 4, Herschel was at work in his observatory at the Cape, and all the world waited for news of some remarkable astronomical discovery. A year and a half later, the world was still waiting. Herschel, painstakingly making his observations, had sent no news home from South Africa. Then, in that August of 1835, the *New York Sun* hit the streets with an account of Herschel's findings.

Herschel, it seemed, had trained a powerful new telescope on the moon—and had found life there! Trees and vegetation, oceans and beaches, bison and goats, cranes and pelicans—all this, and much more, could be seen on the face of Earth's satellite! New York was agog.

The *Sun* showed great restraint in featuring the story. It made the front page, to be sure, over in the right-hand column. Instead of a bold, attention-getting headline, there was the inconspicuous title:

GREAT ASTRONOMICAL DISCOVERIES

Lately Made by Sir John
Herschel, LL.D., F.R.S., etc.
At the Cape of Good Hope.

The *Sun* said that its articles were reprinted from "the supplement to the *Edinburgh Journal of Science*," published in Scotland. Seven articles in all ran in the *Sun*, and before the series

had ended the young newspaper's circulation had boomed all the way up to 19,360—making it the biggest-selling paper in the world.

THE first instalment said nothing about living creatures on the moon. It began in a wordy, old-fashioned way, speaking of "recent discoveries in Astronomy which will build an imperishable monument to the age in which we live, and confer upon the present generation of the human race a proud distinction through all future time." The rest of the first article told of Herschel's observatory at the Cape, speaking with convincing-sounding scientific detail about his various telescopes.

The remarkable new discoveries, it was stated, had resulted from the use of a revolutionary type of telescope. The best available telescope, according to Sir John, would allow him to view the moon as though from a distance of forty miles. That was not good enough. However, Herschel had devised a new telescope on boldly different optical principles. It cast an image on a screen, and a microscope could be used to magnify the image of the telescope.

The trouble with this pretty theory is that it would not work; when an image is magnified in such a way, it quickly becomes

so faint that nothing at all can be seen. But the author of the article had a glib way of skipping over such difficulties or of burying them under a barrage of scientific-sounding words. Thus, the *Sun's* readers learned, Herschel had found a method of "transfusing artificial light," thus brightening the image. A "hydro-oxygen microscope" would be used to show fine details.

The big telescope itself would have a light-collecting lens twenty-four feet in diameter. (By way of comparison, the biggest telescope in use today, at California's Mount Palomar Observatory, has a 200-inch mirror—that is, seventeen feet in diameter.) According to the *Sun*, the casting of the giant lens began on January 3, 1833, but after eight days of cooling it was found that the lens was flawed, and the job had to be done over. The second lens was cast on January 27, and when examined early in February was found to be all but perfect. (It took years to cast and polish the Mount Palomar mirror.)

"The weight of this prodigious lens," the article said, "was 14,826 lbs., or nearly seven tons after being polished; and its estimated magnifying power [was] 42,000 times. It was therefore presumed to be capable of representing objects in our lunar satellite of little more than eighteen

inches in diameter, provided its focal image of them could be rendered distinct by the transfusion of artificial light."

The patient reader, his curiosity aroused by this lengthy scientific preamble, at last got the first hint of what Herschel had seen. On January 10, 1834, the article declared, Herschel had trained his vast telescope on the moon. The microscope, when applied to the image from the telescope, revealed rocks of a vivid greenish-brown, and then clusters of a dark red flower, "precisely similar to the . . . rosepoppy of our cornfields." The delighted astronomer next gazed upon a lunar forest; the trees were evergreens, some resembling English yews, others "as fine a forest of firs, unequivocal firs, as I have ever seen cherished in the bosom of my native mountains."

New wonders followed: an ocean, bordered by "a beach of brilliant white sand," with high waves and deep blue water. Then a strange district where "a lofty chain of obelisk-shaped, or very slender pyramids, standing in irregular groups, each composed of thirty or forty spires" could be seen. A twist of the fine adjustment revealed that the obelisks were "monstrous amethysts, of a diluted claret color, glowing in the intensest light of the sun!"

Then came a barren desert of

chalk and flint. Next, there swam into view a wild forest of oak-like and laurel-like trees, and at last the first lunar animal life to be seen: shaggy creatures much like bison. Soon Herschel spied a beast "of a bluish lead color, about the size of a goat, with a head and beard like him, and a *single horn*," and then pelicans, cranes, and other waterbirds were seen wading for fish in a large river.

By this time, the readers of the *Sun* found it torment to wait for the next daily instalment. The unicorn had provided a stunning climax for the second article; by the third day, newsboys were selling copies of the paper as fast as they could get them to the streets. There was much to gasp over on the third day. Palm-trees with crimson flowers, bears with horns, reindeer and elk and moose, and a beaver-like animal that lacked a tail and walked on two feet—all this and more greeted the *Sun's* readers. An island 55 miles long in a great sea offered geological miracles: "Its hills were pinnacled with tall quartz crystals, of so rich a yellow and orange hue that we at first supposed them to be pointed flames of fire." A miniature zebra, long-tailed birds like golden and blue pheasants, even lowly shellfish on the shores, all were caught by Sir John's keen telescopic eye.

THE *Sun* had more revelations in the succeeding instalments. Cliffs with outcroppings of pure gold; a sheep-like animal with "an amazingly long neck" and "two long spiral horns, white as polished ivory"; a romantic wooded valley; and, in the fourth article, men of the moon! It was while peering at the wild valley that the astronomers "were thrilled with astonishment to perceive four successive flocks of large winged creatures, wholly unlike any kind of birds, descend with a slow, even motion from the cliffs on the western side, and alight upon the plain." When they landed, they folded their wings and walked like human beings, in a manner "both erect and dignified."

The newspaper declared that "they averaged four feet in height, were covered, except on the face, with short and glossy copper-colored hair, and had wings composed of a thin membrane, without hair, lying snugly upon their backs, from the top of the shoulders to the calves of the legs. The face, which was of a yellowish flesh color, was a slight improvement upon that of the large orang outang, being more open and intelligent. . . . In general symmetry of body and limbs they were infinitely superior to the orang outang. . . . The hair on the head was a darker color than that of the body, closely

curled but apparently not woolly, and arranged in two curious semicircles over the temples of the forehead. Their feet could only be seen as they were alternately lifted in walking; but from what we could see of them in so transient a view they appeared thin and very protuberant at the heel. . . ." The moon-men with the bat-like wings seemed to be engaged in conversation. Herschel saw them gesturing with hands and arms, as though talking. Before long, his telescope found other moonmen swimming in a large lake, spreading their wings and shaking them duck-fashion to rid them of water when they emerged. At length, the "man-bats," as Herschel supposedly dubbed them, flew off into the darkness and were lost to view.

Further telescopic exploration located a temple in a lovely setting, rimmed by hills "either of snow-white marble or semitransparent crystal, we could not distinguish which." The temple itself was three-sided, "built of polished sapphire, or of some resplendent blue stone, which, like it, displayed a myriad points of golden light twinkling and scintillating in the sunbeams." Later, other temples of equal beauty were discovered. No one, though, seemed to visit them but for flocks of wild doves. The author of the *Sun's* article wondered, "Had the devotees of these tem-

ples gone the way of all living, or were the latter merely historical monuments?" He hoped that one day an answer would be forthcoming, as further lunar study progressed.

Near one of the temples more moon-men were sighted: "of a larger stature than the former specimens, less dark in color, and in *every respect* an improved variety of the race." The penetrating eye of the telescope revealed them as they ate a large yellow fruit like a gourd, ripping away the rind with their fingers and gobbling the meat avidly. Then, too, they could be seen sucking the juice of a smaller red fruit. "They seemed eminently happy, and even polite, for we saw, in many instances, individuals sitting nearest these piles of fruit, select the largest and brightest specimens, and throw them arch-wise across the circle to some opposite friend . . ."

IT never seemed that the moonmen engaged in any activity but "collecting various fruits in the woods, eating, flying, bathing, and loitering about on the summits of precipices." In the kindly, fertile environment of the moon, labor and industry were unnecessary. Nor were there war or weapons, apparently, though fire was known.

Fire caused trouble for the astronomers on Earth, too. One

night, so the *Sun* related, a careless assistant failed to lower the great lens. Morning sunrise struck the lens; a beam of light was hurled against the side of the observatory, burning a whole fifteen feet in circumference, and "so fierce was the concentration of the solar rays through the gigantic lens, that a clump of trees standing in a line with them was set on fire." Here the scientifically knowledgeable author of the article made a slip; as anyone who has ever used a magnifying glass to start a fire knows, a lens concentrates sunlight into a point, never in a line. But no one seemed to be troubled by this statement in the *Sun*.

It took a week, the readership learned, to repair the damage. By that time, the moon was not visible, and so the astronomers turned their attention to Saturn. The rings of that planet, they discovered, were "the fragments of two destroyed worlds, formerly belonging to our solar system"—an opinion that modern astronomers would not find seriously objectionable. But these rings, "the skeletons of former globes," the *Sun* said, "were not devoid of mountains and seas."

The last of the seven articles trailed off in vague observations of other planets, and then returned briefly to the moon for a last look at a new tribe of moonmen, "of infinitely greater per-

sonal beauty" than the others, very much like the angels of "the more imaginative schools of painters." The *Sun* concluded the series by informing the readers that forty pages of mathematical calculations, which had accompanied the original articles in the *Edinburgh Journal of Science*, would not be reprinted here because of their extreme difficulty and lack of popular appeal.

Other newspapers were quick to comment on the astounding revelations, and on September 1, 1835, the *Sun* proudly printed excerpts from their editorials. "Sir John has added a stock of knowledge to the present age that will immortalize his name," said the *Daily Advertiser*, an Albany paper that regarded the discovery with "unspeakable emotions of pleasure and astonishment." The *New York Times* offered the opinion that "the writer displays the most extensive and accurate knowledge of astronomy. . . . The accounts of the wonderful discoveries in the moon, etc., are all probable and plausible." The *New Yorker*, no relative of today's magazine of that name, hailed "a new era in astronomy and science generally."

TWO Yale professors named Olmstead and Loomis hurried down from New Haven to confer with the editor of the *Sun*. They were excited by the story, and

wanted to see the original Edinburgh articles, with those forty pages of mathematical calculations. The editor referred them to a reporter named Richard Adams Locke, who stalled them a while, then told them that the articles were at the *Sun's* print shop. The professors set out for the printer, but Locke sent a messenger ahead, instructing the printer to send them somewhere else. They were shunted from office to office all day, and finally, without getting to see the calculations, gave up and returned to Yale.

The *Journal of Commerce*, a distinguished rival newspaper, was so taken with the moon story that it wanted permission to reprint it as a separate pamphlet. A *Journal of Commerce* man paid a call on *Sun* editor Benjamin Day, and was also sent to see Richard Adams Locke. Locke tried to talk the man out of reprinting the articles. He gave no reason at first, simply suggesting it might do the *Journal of Commerce's* reputation no good to put out the pamphlet. Finally Locke broke down and told his fellow reporter the truth: the entire moon story was a hoax. What's more, Locke revealed, the *Edinburgh Journal of Science* had gone out of business several years before. The series was not a reprint. He, Locke, one of the *Sun's* cleverest and ablest reporters, had invented the whole thing.

The following day the *Journal of Commerce* printed Locke's confession and gleefully denounced the supposed Herschel discoveries. The *Sun*, which had run the articles as a stunt to build circulation, now saw a chance to keep the fun alive. It denied that Locke had ever admitted anything to the *Journal of Commerce* man. Every paper in the country, the *Sun* said, had praised the articles. But the *Journal of Commerce* was an exception, "because it not only ignorantly doubted the authenticity of the discoveries, but ill-naturedly said that we had fabricated them for the purpose of . . . drawing attention to our paper."

Keeping their faces straight, the editors and reporters of the *Sun* went on insisting that the moon story was honest for another two weeks. Then, on September 16, 1835, the *Sun* finally confessed in print. The newspaper-reading public sorrowfully forced itself to realize that the wonderful forests and lakes of the moon did not exist. Locke had written a brilliant science-fiction story, and the *Sun* had slyly passed it off as fact. His poetic style, his clear description, and above all his confident use of scientific language had made the hoax vividly realistic.

The *Sun* made itself famous through the hoax. For years afterward, the lively, sensational,

cent-a-copy newspaper was one of the most successful in New York.

As for Sir John Herschel, whose good name had been dragged into the moon story, he remained in South Africa, carrying out important scientific observations, until 1838. His report on the work, not published until 1847, said nothing at all about bat-winged men in the moon. The news of Locke's hoax got to South Africa in 1836 or 1837, and the great astronomer thought

it was a very funny story. Herschel was also amused to get a letter from a group of Baptist clergymen in the United States. They congratulated him heartily on his discovery of life on the moon, and informed him that they had held "prayer meetings for the benefit of brethren in the newly explored regions." They beseeched Sir John to tell them "whether science affords any prospects of a method of conveying the Gospel to residents in the moon."

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Philip Sine
(Treasurer)

THE HARD WAY

By ROBERT ROHRER

Lieutenant Percy thumbed the layer of grease from the fuel gauge and squinted at the indicator. He calculated. There was maybe five days' worth of fuel left. The last two days would be hell. He decided it was time to tell his passengers the bad news.

HE sidled between the huge pipes that crooked down like spiders' legs from the fuel storage tanks which squatted on either side of him. He pulled his leatheroid jacket off and slung it over his shoulder. Things were getting hot already. He pushed the rusty door of the tank room open and stepped into the cell room.

His passengers, who were prisoners being shipped from a penitentiary on Earth to one on Mercury, were lying across the steel plates of the floor. They were manacled, and their respective chains were attached at different points on the walls so that they could not possibly gang up on Percy. Not that they would have tried. They knew that Percy

was quick, and wouldn't hesitate to use his gun. Percy had let them know that.

Percy closed the door and leaned back against it. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Hot. He'd have to turn the air conditioning up.

The prisoner whose name was Fuller was glaring dully at Percy. They all glared dully at Percy whenever they had to look at him. Fuller said, "What's the word, Looey?"

Percy opened his eyes. "'Lieutenant Percy,'" he said.

"Lieutenant Percy," said Fuller.

Percy compressed his lips. He was trying to think of the best way to tell them, so he would get the most reaction. Finally he

said, "Well, there isn't much to say, Fuller. We'll all be dead in five days." He said it casually.

The prisoners jerked to sitting positions. The expressions on their faces made Percy laugh inside.

"You kidding, Lieutenant?" said Haig at Percy's side.

"No," said Percy. "The lead ship misjudged. We missed our Mercury orbit. We're caught in the gravitational pull of the sun, and our rockets don't have enough power to pull us out."

"Then why aren't we dead already?" said Fuller.

"I saw the lead ship go, and I knew what was happening," said Percy, stretching and walking toward the door to the control room. There were only three rooms in the tiny ship. "I heeled us around so the rockets are pushing into the force of the gravity. But we're too far in. We're being dragged back slowly. We'll be close enough to burn in five days, I calculate."

"My God!" said Haig. Percy looked at Haig. Haig was shaking and wide-eyed. Percy half-smiled.

For the first time Maitland, a graying man with a face that had once been "distinguished," spoke. "It'll be slow then," he said, calmly stating a fact.

Percy was irritated by Maitland's calmness. He said, "It'll be slow, all right." He had already

decided to tell the prisoners what they should do, but suddenly he got an idea. It was a good idea, and he was glad he had thought of it.

HE sat on the floor in front of the control room door and leaned forward confidentially. He said, "Listen. Listen, there'll be a lot of pain involved if we just sit here and wait for the sun to kill us. There's a way that's a lot easier."

Fuller was lying back against a wall again, apparently relaxed. He said, "What are you getting at?"

Percy cocked his head toward the main air lock. The main air lock was in the center of the wall to Percy's right. There was a long lever at the top of the air lock, well out of the prisoners' reaches. The lever would open the inner and the outer panels of the air lock simultaneously. Its intended use was as a means of quick escape in the event of an emergency.

"It would be a lot quicker to open that lock," said Percy. "There'd be hardly any pain. It would be over like *that*." He snapped his fingers. "Why don't you let me throw the lever?"

Fuller laughed. He said, "Let you!"

"That's right," said Percy. "We're all going to die anyway. I'll let you vote on it." Percy was

excited. He was already imagining what their faces would look like when he stood with his hand on the lever. He would stand that way for a long time, watching them, before he pulled. And he was glad he had thought of taking a vote. He wanted to pull the switch after they had all openly submitted to him. "I just want to make sure, to let you all—well, decide yourselves, before I—"

"No! I don't *want* to die!" shouted Haig suddenly. He was chewing on his knuckles.

Percy said, "Well, we're all going to die, Haig. We may as well—"

"No! No!" said Haig, pushing his back up against the wall with his feet and staring fixedly at nothing. "I don't want to die *now*! I've got to wait! I've got to wait, I've got to think!" Then he began to mutter to himself, "Oh no. Oh no. No. No. No. Die."

Percy frowned. He liked the way Haig was reacting, but the man was a fool as well as a coward. "Haig, you may as well face it," said Percy, "you're going to die—"

Haig shuddered. Fuller said, "Why don't you let him alone?"

Percy turned to Fuller and said, "Shut up! He's a coward, he's so scared he can't see it's better since we're going to die, to get it over with—"

"I don't want to 'get it over with'," said Maitland.

Percy was amazed. "What!" he said.

"Not that way," said Maitland. "You talk about cowardice. Well, what you're suggesting is cowardice."

"What? Cowardice! It's the smart thing to do, the best thing, why, do you know—"

"I'm voting no," said Maitland firmly. "I can't take suicide, no matter how—terrible this is going to be. I rejected suicide once before for something worse. I'm doing it again. I could not die with my honor if—"

"Honor!" Percy mocked. "What do you know about honor! What did you do to get here, did you do that with *honor*?"

MAITLAND blinked and wiped his forehead with his fists and said, "I—I'm talking about the integrity of the individual—within the context of his own code of—"

"My, such big, big words," said Percy. "You must have had a college education, Mr. Maitland. And look what you've done with yourself, oh, *my*! You've come a long way since college, Maitland, a long, long way!"

Percy glanced at Fuller. Fuller was tensed forward slightly. Percy could see that Fuller was almost ready to tell him to go to hell. *Go ahead, Fuller*, thought Percy. *Do it. Just do it.*

"I don't care what you think

of me," said Maitland hoarsely. "I have my own—my own personal honor. My honor tells me that suicide is the coward's way—"

"It's the smart man's way," spat Percy. "You're hollow inside, you know that Maitland? You've got a hollow honor, a hollow soul. You've shot your potential to hell, whatever promise you had in—*college*. You're a dead man right now, Maitland, you, you don't even deserve a vote in this." Percy could see that Fuller's jaws were grinding together. *Come on, Fuller, do it.*

Then Fuller opened his mouth and Percy's heart skipped. But Fuller said, "You want my vote, Lieutenant? Well I vote 'no,' because I just don't want you pulling the switch for me, Lieutenant. So there it is. Three against one. We wait." He said it all between his teeth in a very taut voice.

Percy was furious. That wasn't what he'd wanted Fuller to say. He said, "You scum, do you know what it's like, do you know what it'll be like? First it'll get hot in here, get up to a hundred, like a bad summer on Earth. But it won't stop there, oh no, the closer we get the hotter the ship'll get, and the walls'll start getting red hot, and then they'll get yellow and bright, and you may think the fuel'll explode but it won't, the insulation

on the tanks'll take care of that, we'll keep on sliding in slow and easy, and it'll get hotter and hotter, your hair'll catch, and the skin'll peel off your flesh and your flesh'll boil off your bones but you'll still be alive, you'll be nothing but big globs of blood that can scream, until the heat finally shrivels you up. You hear me? That's what it'll be like!"

Maitland said in an undertone, "It doesn't sound much worse than what we've already gone through."

Percy said, "What do you mean by—"

Fuller said, "Look, as long as we've got any hope, we got to hang on. We don't know who's where out there, there could be a ship ten minutes from us right now. Hear that, Haig?"

"No, no," said Percy, "there were only small ships like this one in the convoy. Either they're in the sun now or they got away, but they can't help us because they'd end up in the same fix. And what can you hope for, if we should be rescued, anyway? What, a prison cell?"

"We can hope maybe you'll die and we won't," said Fuller.

Percy said, "Now that isn't a nice thing to say." He stood up. "That isn't nice at all, is it? You shouldn't say things like that." He kicked Fuller a couple of times. Fuller doubled up on the floor and gulped air. Percy

kicked Fuller a few more times, hard. He had wanted very much to kick Fuller.

FINALLY Percy stopped kicking Fuller and sat down. He still wasn't satisfied with how things were happening. He had expected them all to accept his proposition almost without hesitation. And Fuller hadn't whined or even groaned under Percy's beating.

Percy decided to end the whole damned thing. He said, "Look, I'm in command here, all I have to do is pull that switch if I want to."

"Then why did you give us a choice?" said Maitland.

Percy didn't want to tell them the truth about that. "Look," he lied, "I just wanted to try to be fair. I've tried to show you that—"

"No," said Fuller from the floor. His face was bleeding. "No, it's three against one. Haig doesn't want to die, Maitland's got his honor, and I've got my hope. Now you gave us our choice, and that's it."

Percy scowled. There was a lump in his throat. This hadn't gone at all the way he had wanted it to. Haig was all right, but Maitland and Fuller weren't all right at all.

"To hell with your choice," said Percy. He rose and walked toward the lever above the main

lock. He was angry, so he didn't realize how close he was coming to Fuller. Fuller lurched halfway to his feet, stumbled forward and crashed into Percy, and tore Percy's pistol from its holster.

Percy wheeled to the floor. Fuller aimed the pistol with both hands and shot. The lever above the door snapped off at the base and clattered to the deck, and the base itself glowed red and melted over.

Fuller relaxed and let his arms fall limply against his sides. Percy was on the floor in a half-crouched position. He was looking at the gun with a horrible expression.

Fuller smirked and threw the gun to Percy. "That's all I wanted it for," Fuller said. "Now we don't have to worry about you deciding anything for us, any more."

Percy showed his teeth and stumbled to his feet. He thought, *All right, you damned fools. You want to do it the hard way, we'll do it the hard way.*

Percy backed away from the prisoners. He held the gun level with their stomachs as he moved. When he felt the control room door come against his free hand, Percy stopped backing and looked at the others for several minutes. The others stared wordlessly at Percy.

"It's for your own good," said Percy. But he knew that was not

why he was doing it. He saw the sweat begin to run down the prisoners' faces as he stood there with the gun on them. He saw Fuller's left eyelid twitch again and again, he saw Haig's lips and hands tremble, he saw Maitland's face drain of all the blood that was in it and then drain some more. And he felt a tingling that ran from the butt of his pistol down his arm to his vitals and made his pulse trip-hammer.

There was a drop of perspiration on Fuller's chin. Percy decided to shoot when the drop fell. He watched the drop intently. The drop expanded and contracted as Fuller breathed heavily in and out. It became larger with each breath. Finally it became so large that Percy felt it must fall, so he concentrated all of his energy against it and it swayed and stretched and licked away from Fuller's chin. It twinkled down and *plinked* against the iron floor in a spatter of crystal, and Percy squeezed the trigger and Fuller's shirt front leaped up and then disappeared, and what was left of Fuller fell in a jangle of chains.

Percy pointed the gun at Haig. Haig shouted, "*No! I don't w—!*" Haig moved as Percy's first shot got off, so Percy had to shoot Haig again, and then again, before the screaming stopped.

Next Percy pointed at Maitland. Maitland's bloodless face was a striking contrast to the redness around the perimeter of Percy's vision. Percy shot Maitland in the face, and then there was no contrast. Maitland coughed and fell back.

Percy leaned against the door to the control room. *It was easier for them that way than the heat*, he told himself. He ignored the ecstasy that was still aching against his bones, so he almost believed what he told himself.

Your turn now, Percy, he thought. *Let's get it over with.* He opened the door and stepped into the control room. He sat down on the dirty white slipcover of the pilot's seat. He looked for a moment at the stars. Then he turned the muzzle of the pistol to his face and for a very long time he looked down the barrel.

Slowly the sweat crept out and began to twist in little rivulets down Percy's forehead and cheeks. His finger trembled around the trigger but did not squeeze. Finally he began to make quick, jerking squeezes with his finger. Every time he did this, his throat gave a little whining sound. He was shaking, drenched with perspiration. He put the gun down. He put his hands over his face.

It was going to be a long wait.

THE END

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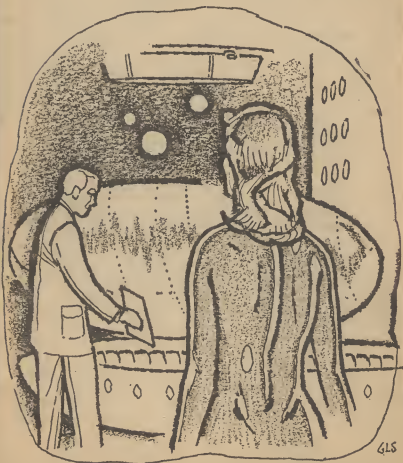
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*He who shapes a world at will, though God-like,
must remember that he must still beware the
chill of timeless time that comes to kill...*

He Who Shapes

By ROGER ZELAZNY

Part One of Two Parts



Illustrated by SCHELLING

LOVELY as it was, with the blood and all, Render could sense that it was about to end.

Therefore, each microsecond would be better off as a minute, he decided—and perhaps the temperature should be increased . . . Somewhere, just at the periphery of everything, the darkness halted its constriction.

Something, like a crescendo of subliminal thunders, was arrested at one raging note. That note was a distillate of shame and pain, and fear.

The Forum was stifling.

Caesar cowered outside the frantic circle. His forearm covered his eyes but it could not stop the seeing, not this time.

The senators had no faces and their garments were spattered with blood. All their voices were like the cries of birds. With an inhuman frenzy they plunged their daggers into the fallen figure.

All, that is, but Render.

The pool of blood in which he stood continued to widen. His arm seemed to be rising and falling with a mechanical regularity and his throat might have been shaping bird-cries, but he was simultaneously apart from and a part of the scene.

For he was Render, the Shaper.

Crouched, anguished and envious, Caesar wailed his protests.

"You have slain him! You have

murdered Marcus Antonius—a blameless, useless fellow!"

Render turned to him, and the dagger in his hand was quite enormous and quite gory.

"Aye," said he.

The blade moved from side to side. Caesar, fascinated by the sharpened steel, swayed to the same rhythm.

"Why?" he cried. "Why?"

"Because," answered Render, "he was a far nobler Roman than yourself."

"You lie! It is not so!"

Render shrugged and returned to the stabbing.

"It is not true!" screamed Caesar. "Not true!"

Render turned to him again and waved the dagger. Puppet-like, Caesar mimicked the pendulum of the blade.

"Not true?" smiled Render. "And who are you to question an assassination such as this? You are no one! You detract from the dignity of this occasion! Begone!"

Jerkily, the pink-faced man rose to his feet, his hair half-wispy, half-wetplastered, a disarray of cotton. He turned, moved away; and as he walked, he looked back over his shoulder.

He had moved far from the circle of assassins, but the scene did not diminish in size. It retained an electric clarity. It made him feel even further removed, ever more alone and apart.

Render rounded a previously unnoticed corner and stood before him, a blind beggar.

Caesar grasped the front of his garment.

"Have you an ill omen for me this day?"

"Beware!" jeered Render.

"Yes! Yes!" cried Caesar.

"Beware! That is good! Beware what?"

"The ides—"

"Yes? The ides—?"

"—of October."

He released the garment.

"What is that you say? What is October?"

"A month."

"You lie! There is no month of October!"

"And that is the date noble Caesar need fear—the non-existent time, the never-to-be-calendared occasion."

Render vanished around another sudden corner.

"Wait! Come back!"

Render laughed, and the Forum laughed with him. The bird-cries became a chorus of inhuman jeers.

"You mock me!" wept Caesar.

The Forum was an oven, and the perspiration formed like a glassy mask over Caesar's narrow forehead, sharp nose, chinless jaw.

"I want to be assassinated too!" he sobbed. "It isn't fair!"

And Render tore the Forum and the senators and the grin-

ning corpse of Antony to pieces and stuffed them into a black sack—with the unseen movement of a single finger—and last of all went Caesar.

CHARLES RENDER sat before the ninety white buttons and the two red ones, not really looking at any of them. His right arm moved in its soundless sling, across the lap-level surface of the console—pushing some of the buttons, skipping over others, moving on, retracing its path to press the next in the order of the Recall Series.

Sensations throttled, emotions reduced to nothing, Representative Erikson knew the oblivion of the womb.

There was a soft click.

Render's hand had glided to the end of the bottom row of buttons. An act of conscious intent—will, if you like—was required to push the red button.

Render freed his arm and lifted off his crown of Medusa-hair leads and microminiature circuitry. He slid from behind his desk-couch and raised the hood. He walked to the window and transpired it, fingering forth a cigarette.

One minute in the ro-womb, he decided. No more. This is a crucial one . . . Hope it doesn't snow till later—those clouds look mean . . .

It was smooth yellow trellises

and high towers, glassy and gray, all smouldering into evening under a shale-colored sky; the city was squared volcanic islands, glowing in the end-of-day light, rumbling deep down under the earth; it was fat, incessant rivers of traffic, rushing.

Render turned away from the window and approached the great egg that lay beside his desk, smooth and glittering. It threw back a reflection that smashed all aquilinity from his nose, turned his eyes to gray saucers, transformed his hair into a light-streaked skyline; his reddish necktie became the wide tongue of a ghouel.

He smiled, reached across the desk. He pressed the second red button.

With a sigh, the egg lost its dazzling opacity and a horizontal crack appeared about its middle. Through the now-transparent shell, Render could see Erikson grimacing, squeezing his eyes tight, fighting against a return to consciousness and the thing it would contain. The upper half of the egg rose vertical to the base, exposing him knobby and pink on half-shell. When his eyes opened he did not look at Render. He rose to his feet and began dressing. Render used this time to check the ro-womb.

He leaned back across his desk and pressed the buttons: temperature control, full range,

check; exotic sounds—he raised the earphone—*check*, on bells, on buzzes, on violin notes and whistles, on squeals and moans, on traffic noises and the sound of surf; *check*, on the feedback circuit—holding the patient's own voice, trapped earlier in analysis; *check*, on the sound blanket, the moisture spray, the odor banks; *check*, on the couch agitator and the colored lights, the taste stimulants . . .

RENDER closed the egg and shut off its power. He pushed the unit into the closet, palmed shut the door. The tapes had registered a valid sequence.

"Sit down," he directed Erikson.

The man did so, fidgeting with his collar.

"You have full recall," said Render, "so there is no need for me to summarize what occurred. Nothing can be hidden from me. I was there."

Erikson nodded.

"The significance of the episode should be apparent to you."

Erikson nodded again, finally finding his voice. "But was it valid?" he asked. "I mean, you constructed the dream and you controlled it, all the way. I didn't really *dream* it—in the way I would normally dream. Your ability to make things happen stacks the deck for whatever you're going to say —doesn't it?"

Render shook his head slowly, flicked an ash into the southern hemisphere of his globe-made-ashtray, and met Erikson's eyes.

"It is true that I supplied the format and modified the forms. You, however, filled them with an emotional significance, promoted them to the status of symbols corresponding to your problem. If the dream was not a valid analogue it would not have provoked the reactions it did. It would have been devoid of the anxiety-patterns which were registered on the tapes.

"You have been in analysis for many months now," he continued, "and everything I have learned thus far serves to convince me that your fears of assassination are without any basis in fact."

Erikson glared.

"Then why the hell do I have them?"

"Because," said Render, "you would like very much to be the subject of an assassination."

Erikson smiled then, his composure beginning to return.

"I assure you, doctor, I have never contemplated suicide, nor have I any desire to stop living."

He produced a cigar and applied a flame to it. His hand shook.

"When you came to me this summer," said Render, "you stated that you were in fear of an attempt on your life. You were

quite vague as to why anyone should want to kill you—"

"My position! You can't be a Representative as long as I have and make no enemies!"

"Yet," replied Render, "it appears that you have managed it. When you permitted me to discuss this with your detectives I was informed that they could unearth nothing to indicate that your fears might have any real foundation. Nothing."

"They haven't looked far enough—or in the right places. They'll turn up something."

"I'm afraid not."

"Why?"

"Because, I repeat, your feelings are without any objective basis. —Be honest with me. Have you any information whatsoever indicating that someone hates you enough to want to kill you?"

"I receive many threatening letters . . ."

"As do all Representatives—and all of those directed to you during the past year have been investigated and found to be the work of cranks. Can you offer me *one* piece of evidence to substantiate your claims?"

Erikson studied the tip of his cigar.

"I came to you on the advice of a colleague," he said, "came to you to have you poke around inside my mind to find me something of that sort, to give my de-

tectives something to work with. —Someone I've injured severely perhaps—or some damaging piece of legislation I've dealt with . . ."

"—And I found nothing," said Render, "nothing, that is, but the cause of your discontent. Now, of course, you are afraid to hear it, and you are attempting to divert me from explaining my diagnosis—"

"I am not!"

"Then listen. You can comment afterwards if you want, but you've poked and dawdled around here for months, unwilling to accept what I presented to you in a dozen different forms. Now I am going to tell you outright what it is, and you can do what you want about it."

"Fine."

"First," he said, "you would like very much to have an enemy or enemies—"

"Ridiculous!"

"—Because it is the only alternative to having friends—"

"I have lots of friends!"

"—Because nobody wants to be completely ignored, to be an object for whom no one has really strong feelings. Hatred and love are the ultimate forms of human regard. Lacking one, and unable to achieve it, you sought the other. You wanted it so badly that you succeeded in convincing yourself it existed. But there is always a psychic pricetag on

these things. Answering a genuine emotional need with a body of desire-surrogates does not produce real satisfaction, but anxiety, discomfort—because in these matters the psyche should be an open system. You did not seek outside yourself for human regard. You were closed off. You created that which you needed from the stuff of your own being. You are a man very much in need of strong relationships with other people."

"Manure!"

"Take it or leave it," said Render. "I suggest you take it."

"I'VE been paying you for half a year to help find out who wants to kill me. Now you sit there and tell me I made the whole thing up to satisfy a desire to have someone hate me."

"Hate you, or love you. That's right."

"It's absurd! I meet so many people that I carry a pocket recorder and a lapel-camera, just so I can recall them all . . ."

"Meeting quantities of people is hardly what I was speaking of. —Tell me, *did* that dream sequence have a strong meaning for you?"

Erikson was silent for several tickings of the huge wallclock.

"Yes," he finally conceded, "it did. But your interpretation of the matter is still absurd. Granting though, just for the sake of

argument, that what you say is correct—what would I do to get out of this bind?"

Render leaned back in his chair.

"Rechannel the energies that went into producing the thing. Meet some people as yourself, Joe Erikson, rather than Representative Erikson. Take up something you can do with other people—something non-political, and perhaps somewhat competitive—and make some real friends or enemies, preferably the former. I've encouraged you to do this all along."

"Then tell me something else."

"Gladly."

"Assuming you *are* right, why is it that I am neither liked nor hated, and never have been? I have a responsible position in the Legislature. I meet people all the time. Why am I so neutral a—thing?"

Highly familiar now with Erikson's career, Render had to push aside his true thoughts on the matter, as they were of no operational value. He wanted to cite him Dante's observations concerning the trimmers—those souls who, denied heaven for their lack of virtue, were also denied entrance to hell for a lack of significant vices—in short, the ones who trimmed their sails to move them with every wind of the times, who lacked direction, who were not really concerned

toward which ports they were pushed. Such was Erikson's long and colorless career of migrant loyalties, of political reversals.

Render said:

"More and more people find themselves in such circumstances these days. It is due largely to the increasing complexity of society and the depersonalization of the individual into a sociometric unit. Even the act of cathecting toward other persons has grown more forced as a result. There are so many of us these days."

Erikson nodded, and Render smiled inwardly.

Sometimes the gruff line, and then the lecture . . .

"I've got the feeling you could be right," said Erikson. "Sometimes I *do* feel like what you just described—a unit, something depersonalized . . ."

Render glanced at the clock.

"What you choose to do about it from here is, of course, your own decision to make. I think you'd be wasting your time to remain in analysis any longer. We are now both aware of the cause of your complaint. I can't take you by the hand and show you how to lead your life. I can indicate, I can commiserate—but no more deep probing. Make an appointment as soon as you feel a need to discuss your activities and relate them to my diagnosis."

"I will," nodded Erikson, "and

—damn that dream! It got to me. You can make them seem as vivid as waking life—more vivid . . . It may be a long while before I can forget it.”

“I hope so.”

“Okay, doctor.” He rose to his feet, extended a hand. “I’ll probably be back in a couple weeks. I’ll give this socializing a fair try.” He grinned at the word he normally frowned upon. “In fact, I’ll start now. May I buy you a drink around the corner, downstairs?”

Render met the moist palm which seemed as weary of the performance as a lead actor in too successful a play. He felt almost sorry as he said, “Thank you, but I have an engagement.”

Render helped him on with his coat then, handed him his hat, saw him to the door.

“Well, good night.”

“Good night.”

AS the door closed soundlessly behind him, Render recrossed the dark Astrakhan to his mahogany fortress and flipped his cigarette into the southern hemisphere. He leaned back in his chair, hands behind his head, eyes closed.

“Of course it was more real than life,” he informed no one in particular, “I shaped it.”

Smiling, he reviewed the dream sequence step by step, wishing some of his former in-

structors could have witnessed it. It had been well-constructed and powerfully executed, as well as being precisely appropriate for the case at hand. But then, he was Render, the Shaper—one of the two hundred or so special analysts whose own psychic makeup permitted them to enter into neurotic patterns without carrying away more than an esthetic gratification from the mimesis of aberrance—a Sane Hatter.

Render stirred his recollections. He had been analyzed himself, analyzed and passed upon as a granite-willed, ultra-stable outsider—tough enough to weather the basilisk gaze of a fixation, walk unscathed amidst the chimarae of perversions, force dark Mother Medusa to close her eyes before the caduceus of his art. His own analysis had not been difficult. Nine years before (it seemed much longer) he had suffered a willing injection of novocain into the most painful area of his spirit. It was after the auto wreck, after the death of Ruth, and of Miranda their daughter, that he had begun to feel detached. Perhaps he did not want to recover certain empathies; perhaps his own world was now based upon a certain rigidity of feeling. If this was true, he was wise enough in the ways of the mind to realize it, and perhaps he had

decided that such a world had its own compensations.

His son Peter was now ten years old. He was attending a school of quality, and he penned his father a letter every week. The letters were becoming progressively literate, showing signs of a precociousness of which Render could not but approve. He would take the boy with him to Europe in the summer.

As for Jill—Jill DeVille (what a luscious, ridiculous name!—he loved her for it)—she was growing, if anything, more interesting to him. (He wondered if this was an indication of early middle age.) He was vastly taken by her unmusical nasal voice, her sudden interest in architecture, her concern with the unremovable mole on the right side of her otherwise well-designed nose. He should really call her immediately and go in search of a new restaurant. For some reason though, he did not feel like it.

It had been several weeks since he had visited his club, The Partridge and Scalpel, and he felt a strong desire to eat from an oaken table, alone, in the split-level dining room with the three fireplaces, beneath the artificial torches and the boars' heads like gin ads. So he pushed his perforated membership card into the phone-slot on his desk and there were two buzzes behind the voice-screen.

"Hello, Partridge and Scalpel," said the voice. "May I help you?"

"Charles Render," he said. "I'd like a table in about half an hour."

"How many will there be?"

"Just me."

"Very good, sir. Half an hour, then.—That's 'Render'?—*R-e-n-d-e-r*?"

"Right."

"Thank you."

He broke the connection, rose from his desk. Outside, the day had vanished.

The monoliths and the towers gave forth their own light now. A soft snow, like sugar, was sifting down through the shadows and transforming itself into beads on the windowpane.

Render shrugged into his overcoat, turned off the lights, locked the inner office. There was a note on Mrs. Hedges' blotter.

Miss DeVille called, it said.

He crumpled the note and tossed it into the waste-chute. He would call her tomorrow and say he had been working until late on his lecture.

He switched off the final light, clapped his hat onto his head and passed through the outer door, locking it as he went. The drop took him to the sub-subcellar where his auto was parked.

IT was chilly in the sub-sub, and his footsteps seemed loud on

the concrete as he passed among the parked vehicles. Beneath the glare of the naked lights, his S-7 Spinner was a sleek gray cocoon from which it seemed turbulent wings might at any moment emerge. The double row of antennae which fanned forward from the slope of its hood added to this feeling. Render thumbed open the door.

He touched the ignition and there was the sound of a lone bee awakening in a great hive. The door swung soundlessly shut as he raised the steering wheel and locked it into place. He spun up the spiral ramp and came to a rolling stop before the big over-head.

As the door rattled upward he lighted his destination screen and turned the knob that shifted the broadcast map. —Left to right, top to bottom, section by section he shifted it, until he located the portion of Carnegie Avenue he desired. He punched out its coordinates and lowered the wheel. The car switched over to monitor and moved out onto the highway marginal. Render lit a cigarette.

Pushing his seat back into the centerspace, he left all the windows transparent. It was pleasant to half-recline and watch the oncoming cars drift past him like swarms of fireflies. He pushed his hat back on his head and stared upward.

He could remember a time when he had loved snow, when it had reminded him of novels by Thomas Mann and music by Scandanavian composers. In his mind now, though, there was another element from which it could never be wholly dissociated. He could visualize so clearly the eddies of milk-white coldness that swirled about his old manual-steer auto, flowing into its fire-charred interior to rewhiten that which had been blackened; so clearly—as though he had walked toward it across a chalky lakebottom—it, the sunken wreck, and he, the diver—unable to open his mouth to speak, for fear of drowning; and he knew, whenever he looked upon falling snow, that somewhere skulls were whitening. But nine years had washed away much of the pain, and he also knew that the night was lovely.

He was sped along the wide, wide roads, shot across high bridges, their surfaces slick and gleaming beneath his lights, was woven through frantic cloverleaves and plunged into a tunnel whose dimly glowing walls blurred by him like a mirage. Finally, he switched the windows to opaque and closed his eyes.

He could not remember whether he had dozed for a moment or not, which meant he probably had. He felt the car slowing, and

he moved the seat forward and turned on the windows again. Almost simultaneously, the cut-off buzzer sounded. He raised the steering wheel and pulled into the parking dome, stepped out onto the ramp and left the car to the parking unit, receiving his ticket from that box-headed robot which took its solemn revenge on mankind by sticking forth a cardboard tongue at everyone it served.

AS always, the noises were as subdued as the lighting. The place seemed to absorb sound and convert it into warmth, to lull the tongue with aromas strong enough to be tasted, to hypnotize the ear with the vivid crackle of the triple hearths.

Render was pleased to see that his favorite table, in the corner off to the right of the smaller fireplace, had been held for him. He knew the menu from memory, but he studied it with zeal as he sipped a Manhattan and worked up an order to match his appetite. Shaping sessions always left him ravenously hungry.

"Doctor Render . . . ?"

"Yes?" He looked up.

"Doctor Shallot would like to speak with you," said the waiter.

"I don't know anyone named Shallot," he said. "Are you sure he doesn't want Bender? He's a surgeon from Metro who sometimes eats here . . ."

The waiter shook his head.

"No sir—'Render'. See here?"

He extended a three-by-five card on which Render's full name was typed in capital letters. "Doctor Shallot has dined here nearly every night for the past two weeks," he explained, "and on each occasion has asked to be notified if you came in."

"Hm?" mused Render.

"That's odd. Why didn't he just call me at my office?"

The waiter smiled and made a vague gesture.

"Well, tell him to come on over," he said, gulping his Manhattan, "and bring me another of these."

"Unfortunately, Doctor Shallot is blind," explained the waiter. "It would be easier if you—"

"All right, sure." Render stood up, relinquishing his favorite table with a strong premonition that he would not be returning to it that evening.

"Lead on."

They threaded their way among the diners, heading up to the next level. A familiar face said "hello" from a table set back against the wall, and Render nodded a greeting to a former seminar pupil whose name was Jurgens or Jirkans or something like that.

He moved on, into the smaller dining room wherein only two tables were occupied. No, three. There was one set in the corner

at the far end of the darkened bar, partly masked by an ancient suit of armor. The waiter was heading him in that direction.

They stopped before the table and Render stared down into the darkened glasses that had tilted upward as they approached. Doctor Shallot was a woman, somewhere in the vicinity of her early thirties. Her low bronze bangs did not fully conceal the spot of silver which she wore on her forehead like a caste-mark. Render inhaled, and her head jerked slightly as the tip of his cigarette flared. She appeared to be staring straight up into his eyes. It was an uncomfortable feeling, even knowing that all she could distinguish of him was that which her minute photoelectric cell transmitted to her visual cortex over the hair-fine wire implants attached to that oscillator-converter: in short, the glow of his cigarette.

"Doctor Shallot, this is Doctor Render," the waiter was saying.

"Good evening," said Render.

"Good evening," she said. "My name is Eileen and I've wanted very badly to meet you." He thought he detected a slight quaver in her voice. "Will you join me for dinner?"

"My pleasure," he acknowledged, and the waiter drew out the chair.

Render sat down, noting that the woman across from him al-

ready had a drink. He reminded the waiter of his second Manhattan.

"Have you ordered yet?" he inquired.

"No."

". . . And two menus—" he started to say, then bit his tongue.

"Only one," she smiled.

"Make it none," he amended, and recited the menu.

They ordered. Then:

"Do you always do that?"

"What?"

"Carry menus in your head."

"Only a few," he said, "for awkward occasions. What was it you wanted to see—talk to me about?"

"You're a neuropsychiatric therapist," she stated, "a Shaper."

"And you are—?"

"—a resident in psychiatry at State Psych. I have a year remaining."

"You knew Sam Riscomb then."

"Yes, he helped me get my appointment. He was my adviser."

"He was a very good friend of mine. We studied together at Menninger."

She nodded.

"I'd often heard him speak of you—that's one of the reasons I wanted to meet you. He's responsible for encouraging me to go ahead with my plans, despite my handicap."

RENDER stared at her. She was wearing a dark green dress which appeared to be made of velvet. About three inches to the left of the bodice was a pin which might have been gold. It displayed a red stone which could have been a ruby, around which the outline of a goblet was cast. Or was it really two profiles that were outlined, staring through the stone at one another? It seemed vaguely familiar to him, but he could not place it at the moment. It glittered expensively in the dim light.

Render accepted his drink from the waiter.

"I want to become a neuro-participant therapist," she told him.

And if she had possessed vision Render would have thought she was staring at him, hoping for some response in his expression. He could not quite calculate what she wanted him to say.

"I commend your choice," he said, "and I respect your ambition." He tried to put his smile into his voice. "It is not an easy thing, of course, not all of the requirements being academic ones."

"I know," she said. "But then, I have been blind since birth and it was not an easy thing to come this far."

"Since birth?" he repeated. "I thought you might have lost your sight recently. You did your

undergrad work then, and went on through med school without eyes . . . That's—rather impressive."

"Thank you," she said, "but it isn't. Not really. I heard about the first neuroparticipants—Bartelmezt and the rest—when I was a child, and I decided then that I wanted to be one. My life ever since has been governed by that desire."

"What did you do in the labs?" he inquired. "—Not being able to see a specimen, look through a microscope . . . ? Or all that reading?"

"I hired people to read my assignments to me. I taped everything. The school understood that I wanted to go into psychiatry, and they permitted a special arrangement for labs. I've been guided through the dissection of cadavers by lab assistants, and I've had everything described to me. I can tell things by touch . . . and I have a memory like yours with the menu," she smiled. "The quality of psychoparticipation phenomena can only be gauged by the therapist himself, at that moment outside of time and space as we normally know it, when he stands in the midst of a world erected from the stuff of another man's dreams, recognizes there the non-Euclidian architecture of aberrance, and then takes his patient by the hand and tours the landscape . . .

If he can lead him back to the common earth, then his judgments were sound, his actions valid.' "

"From *Why No Psychometrics in This Place*," reflected Render.

"—by Charles Render, M.D."

"Our dinner is already moving in this direction," he noted, picking up his drink as the speed-cooked meal was pushed toward them in the kitchen-buoy.

"That's one of the reasons I wanted to meet you," she continued, raising her glass as the dishes rattled before her. "I want you to help me become a Shaper."

Her shaded eyes, as vacant as a statue's, sought him again.

"Yours is a completely unique situation," he commented. "There has never been a congenitally blind neuroparticipant—for obvious reasons. I'd have to consider all the aspects of the situation before I could advise you. Let's eat now, though. I'm starved."

"All right. But my blindness does not mean that I have never seen."

He did not ask her what she meant by that, because prime ribs were standing in front of him now and there was a bottle of Chambertin at his elbow. He did pause long enough to notice though, as she raised her left hand from beneath the table, that she wore no rings.

"I WONDER if it's still snowing," he commented as they drank their coffee. "It was coming down pretty hard when I pulled into the dome."

"I hope so," she said, "even though it diffuses the light and I can't 'see' anything at all through it. I like to feel it falling about me and blowing against my face."

"How do you get about?"

"My dog, Sigmund—I gave him the night off," she smiled, "—he can guide me anywhere. He's a mutie Shepherd."

"Oh?" Render grew curious. "Can he talk much?"

She nodded.

"That operation wasn't as successful on him as on some of them, though. He has a vocabulary of about four hundred words, but I think it causes him pain to speak. He's quite intelligent. You'll have to meet him sometime."

Render began speculating immediately. He had spoken with such animals at recent medical conferences, and had been startled by their combination of reasoning ability and their devotion to their handlers. Much chromosome tinkering, followed by delicate embryo-surgery, was required to give a dog a brain capacity greater than a chimpanzee's. Several followup operations were necessary to produce vocal abilities. Most such experi-

ments ended in failure, and the dozen or so puppies a year on which they succeeded were valued in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars each. He realized then, as he lit a cigarette and held the light for a moment, that the stone in Miss Shallot's medallion was a genuine ruby. He began to suspect that her admission to a medical school might, in addition to her academic record, have been based upon a sizeable endowment to the college of her choice. Perhaps he was being unfair though, he chided himself.

"Yes," he said, "we might do a paper on canine neuroses. Does he ever refer to his father as 'that son of a female Shepherd'?"

"He never met his father," she said, quite soberly. "He was raised apart from other dogs. His attitude could hardly be typical. I don't think you'll ever learn the functional psychology of the dog from a mutie."

"I imagine you're right," he dismissed it. "More coffee?"

"No, thanks."

Deciding it was time to continue the discussion, he said, "So you want to be a Shaper . . ."

"Yes."

"I hate to be the one to destroy anybody's high ambitions," he told her. "Like poison, I hate it. Unless they have no foundation at all in reality. Then I can be

ruthless. So—honestly, frankly, and in all sincerity, I do not see how it could ever be managed. Perhaps you're a fine psychiatrist—but in my opinion, it is a physical and mental impossibility for you ever to become a neuroparticipant. As for my reasons—"

"Wait," she said. "Not here, please. Humor me. I'm tired of



this stuffy place—take me somewhere else to talk. I think I might be able to convince you there is a way”.

“Why not?” he shrugged. “I have plenty time. Sure—you call it. Where?”

“Blindspin?”

He suppressed an unwilling chuckle at the expression, but she laughed aloud.

“Fine,” he said, “but I’m still thirsty.”

A bottle of champagne was tallied and he signed the check despite her protests. It arrived in a colorful “Drink While You Drive” basket, and they stood then, and she was tall, but he was taller.

B LINDSPIN.

A single name of a multitude of practices centered about the auto-driven auto. Flashing across the country in the sure hands of an invisible chauffeur, windows all opaque, night dark, sky high, tires assailing the road below like four phantom buzzsaws—and starting from scratch and ending in the same place, and never knowing where you are going or where you have been—it is possible, for a moment, to kindle some feeling of individuality in the coldest brainpan, to produce a momentary awareness of self by virtue of an apartness from all but a sense of motion. This is

because movement through darkness is the ultimate abstraction of life itself—at least that’s what one of the Vital Comedians said, and everybody in the place laughed.

Actually now, the phenomenon known as blindspin first became prevalent (as might be suspected) among certain younger members of the community, when monitored highways deprived them of the means to exercise their automobiles in some of the more individualistic ways which had come to be frowned upon by the National Traffic Control Authority. Something had to be done.

It was.

The first, disastrous reaction involved the simple engineering feat of disconnecting the broadcast control unit after one had entered onto a monitored highway. This resulted in the car’s vanishing from the ken of the monitor and passing back into the control of its occupants. Jealous as a deity, a monitor will not tolerate that which denies its programmed omniscience; it will thunder and lightning in the Highway Control Station nearest the point of last contact, sending winged seraphs in search of that which has slipped from sight.

Often, however, this was too late in happening, for the roads are many and well-paved. Escape

from detection was, at first, relatively easy to achieve.

Other vehicles, though, necessarily behave as if a rebel has no actual existence. Its presence cannot be allowed for.

Boxed-in, on a heavily-traveled section of roadway, the offender is subject to immediate annihilation in the event of any overall speedup or shift in traffic pattern which involves movement through his theoretically vacant position. This, in the early days of monitor-controls, caused a rapid series of collisions. Monitoring devices later became far more sophisticated, and mechanized cutoffs reduced the collision incidence subsequent to such an action. The quality of the pulpefactions and contusions which did occur, however, remained unaltered.

The next reaction was based on a thing which had been overlooked because it was obvious. The monitors took people where they wanted to go only because people told them they wanted to go there. A person pressing a random series of coordinates, without reference to any map, would either be left with a stalled automobile and a "RECHECK YOUR COORDINATES" light, or would suddenly be whisked away in any direction. The latter possesses a certain romantic appeal in that it offers speed, unexpected sights,

and free hands. Also, it is perfectly legal; and it is possible to navigate all over two continents in this manner, if one is possessed of sufficient wherewithal and gluteal stamina.

As is the case in all such matters, the practice diffused upwards through the age brackets. School teachers who only drove on Sundays fell into disrepute as selling points for used autos. Such is the way a world ends, said the entertainer.

End or no, the car designed to move on monitored highways is a mobile efficiency unit, complete with latrine, cupboard, refrigerator compartment and gaming table. It also sleeps two with ease and four with some crowding. On occasion, three can be a real crowd.

RENDER drove out of the dome and into the marginal aisle. He halted the car.

"Want to jab some coordinates?" he asked.

"You do it. My fingers know too many."

Render punched random buttons. The Spinner moved onto the highway. Render asked speed of the vehicle then, and it moved into the high-acceleration lane.

The Spinner's lights burnt holes in the darkness. The city backed away fast; it was a smouldering bonfire on both sides of the road, stirred by sud-

den gusts of wind, hidden by white swirlings, obscured by the steady fall of gray ash. Render knew his speed was only about sixty percent of what it would have been on a clear, dry night.

He did not blank the windows, but leaned back and stared out through them. Eileen "looked" ahead into what light there was.



Neither of them said anything for ten or fifteen minutes.

The city shrank to sub-city as they sped on. After a time, short sections of open road began to appear.

"Tell me what it looks like outside," she said.

"Why didn't you ask me to describe your dinner, or the suit of armor beside our table?"

"Because I tasted one and felt the other. This is different."

"There is snow falling outside. Take it away and what you have left is black."

"What else?"

"There is slush on the road. When it starts to freeze, traffic will drop to a crawl unless we outrun this storm. The slush looks like an old, dark syrup, just starting to get sugary on top."

"Anything else?"

"That's it, lady."

"Is it snowing harder or less hard than when we left the club?"

"Harder, I should say."

"Would you pour me a drink?" she asked him.

"Certainly."

They turned their seats inward and Render raised the table. He fetched two glasses from the cupboard.

"Your health," said Render, after he had poured.

"Here's looking at you."

Render downed his drink. She sipped hers. He waited for her next comment. He knew that two

cannot play at the Socratic game, and he expected more questions before she said what she wanted to say.

She said: "What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen?"

Yes, he decided, he had guessed correctly.

He replied without hesitation: "The sinking of Atlantis."

"I was serious."

"So was I."

"Would you care to elaborate?"

"I sank Atlantis," he said, "personally."

"It was about three years ago. And God! it was lovely! It was all ivory towers and golden minarets and silver balconies. There were bridges of opal, and crimson pennants and a milk-white river flowing between lemon-colored banks. There were jade steeples, and trees as old as the world tickling the bellies of clouds, and ships in the great sea-harbor of Xanadu, as delicately constructed as musical instruments, all swaying with the tides. The twelve princes of the realm held court in the dozen-pillared Colliseum of the Zodiac, to listen to a Greek tenor sax play at sunset.

"The Greek, of course, was a patient of mine—paranoiac. The etiology of the thing is rather complicated, but that's what I wandered into inside his mind. I gave him free rein for awhile, and in the end I had to split

Atlantis in half and sink it full fathom five. He's playing again and you've doubtless heard his sounds, if you like such sounds at all. He's good. I still see him periodically, but he is no longer the last descendent of the greatest minstrel of Atlantis. He's just a fine, late twentieth-century saxman.

"Sometimes though, as I look back on the apocalypse I worked within his vision of grandeur, I experience a fleeting sense of lost beauty—because, for a single moment, his abnormally intense feelings were my feelings, and he felt that his dream was the most beautiful thing in the world."

He refilled their glasses.

"That wasn't exactly what I meant," she said.

"I know."

"I meant something real."

"It was more real than real, I assure you."

"I don't doubt it, but. . ."

"—But I destroyed the foundation you were laying for your argument. Okay, I apologize. I'll hand it back to you. Here's something that could be real:

"We are moving along the edge of a great bowl of sand," he said. "Into it, the snow is gently drifting. In the spring the snow will melt, the waters will run down into the earth, or be evaporated away by the heat of the sun. Then only the sand will remain. Nothing grows in the sand, except

for an occasional cactus. Nothing lives here but snakes, a few birds, insects, burrowing things, and a wandering coyote or two. In the afternoon these things will look for shade. Any place where there's an old fence post or a rock or a skull or a cactus to block out the sun, there you will witness life cowering before the elements. But the colors are beyond belief, and the elements are more lovely, almost, than the things they destroy."

"There is no such place near here," she said.

"If I say it, then there is. Isn't there? I've seen it."

"Yes . . . You're right."

"And it doesn't matter if it's a painting by a woman named O'Keefe, or something right outside our window, does it? If I've seen it?"

"I acknowledge the truth of the diagnosis," she said. "Do you want to speak it for me?"

"No, go ahead."

HE refilled the small glasses once more.

"The damage is in my eyes," she told him, "not my brain."

He lit her cigarette.

"I can see with other eyes if I can enter other brains."

He lit his own cigarette.

"Neuroparticipation is based upon the fact that two nervous systems can share the same impulses, the same fantasies . . ."

"*Controlled fantasies.*"

"I could perform therapy and at the same time experience genuine visual impressions."

"No," said Render.

"You don't know what it's like to be cut off from a whole area of stimuli! To know that a Mongoloid idiot can experience something you can never know—and that he cannot appreciate it because, like you, he was condemned before birth in a court of biological hapstance, in a place where there is no justice—only fortuity, pure and simple."

"The universe did not invent justice. Man did. Unfortunately, man must reside in the universe."

"I'm not asking the universe to help me—I'm asking you."

"I'm sorry," said Render.

"Why won't you help me?"

"At this moment you are demonstrating my main reason."

"Which is . . . ?"

"Emotion. This thing means far too much to you. When the therapist is in-phase with a patient he is narco-electrically removed from most of his own bodily sensations. This is necessary—because his mind must be completely absorbed by the task at hand. It is also necessary that his emotions undergo a similar suspension. This, of course, is impossible in the one sense that a person always emotes to some degree. But the therapist's emotions are sublimated into a gen-

eralized feeling of exhilaration—or, as in my own case, into an artistic reverie. With you, however, the ‘seeing’ would be too much. You would be in constant danger of losing control of the dream.”

“I disagree with you.”

“Of course you do. But the fact remains that you would be dealing, and dealing constantly, with the abnormal. The power of a neurosis is unimaginable to ninety-nine point etcetera percent of the population, because we can never adequately judge the intensity of our own—let alone those of others, when we only see them from the outside. That is why no neuroparticipant will ever undertake to treat a full-blown psychotic. The few pioneers in that area are all themselves in therapy today. It would be like diving into a maelstrom. If the therapist loses the upper hand in an intense session he becomes the Shaped rather than the Shaper. The synapses respond like a fission reaction when nervous impulses are artificially augmented. The transference effect is almost instantaneous.

“I did an awful lot of skiing five years ago. This is because I was a claustrophobe. I had to run and it took me six months to beat the thing—all because of one tiny lapse that occurred in a measureless fraction of an instant. I had to refer the patient to another therapist. And this was only a

minor repercussion. —If you were to go ga-ga over the scenery, girl, you could wind up in a rest home for life.”

SHE finished her drink and Render refilled the glass. The night raced by. They had left the city far behind them, and the road was open and clear. The darkness eased more and more of itself between the falling flakes. The Spinner picked up speed.

“All right,” she admitted, “maybe you’re right. Still, though, I think you can help me.”

“How?” he asked

“Accustom me to seeing, so that the images will lose their novelty, the emotions wear off. Accept me as a patient and rid me of my sight-anxiety. Then what you have said so far will cease to apply. I will be able to undertake the training then, and give my full attention to therapy. I’ll be able to sublimate the sight-pleasure into something else.”

Render wondered.

Perhaps it could be done. It would be a difficult undertaking, though.

It might also make therapeutic history.

No one was really qualified to try it, because no one had ever tried it before.

But Eileen Shallot was a rarity—no, a unique item—for it was likely she was the only person in the world who combined the nec-

essary technical background with the unique problem.

He drained his glass, refilled it, refilled hers.

He was still considering the problem as the "RE-COORDINATE" light came on and the car pulled into a cutoff and stood there. He switched off the buzzer and sat there for a long while, thinking.

It was not often that other persons heard him acknowledge his feelings regarding his skill. His colleagues considered him modest. Offhand, though, it might be noted that he was aware that the day a better neuroparticipant began practicing would be the day that a troubled homo sapien was to be treated by something but immeasurably less than angels.

Two drinks remained. Then he tossed the emptied bottle into the backbin.

"You know something?" he finally said.

"What?"

"It might be worth a try."

He swiveled about then and leaned forward to re-coordinate, but she was there first. As he pressed the buttons and the S-7 swung around, she kissed him. Below her dark glasses her cheeks were moist.

II.

THE suicide bothered him more than it should have, and Mrs.

Lambert had called the day before to cancel her appointment. So Render decided to spend the morning being pensive. Accordingly, he entered the office wearing a cigar and a frown.

"Did you see . . . ?" asked Mrs. Hedges.

"Yes." He pitched his coat onto the table that stood in the far corner of the room. He crossed to the window, stared down. "Yes," he repeated, "I was driving by with my windows clear. They were still cleaning up when I passed."

"Did you know him?"

"I don't even know the name yet. How could I?"

"Priss Tully just called me—she's a receptionist for that engineering outfit up on the eightysixth. She says it was James Irizarry, an ad designer who had offices down the hall from them.—That's a long way to fall. He must have been unconscious when he hit, huh? He bounced off the building. If you open the window and lean out you can see—off to the left there—where . . ."

"Never mind, Bennie. —Your friend have any idea why he did it?"

"Not really. His secretary came running up the hall, screaming. Seems she went in his office to see him about some drawings, just as he was getting up over the sill. There was a note on his board. 'I've had everything

I wanted,' it said. 'Why wait around?' Sort of funny, huh? I don't mean *funny*. . ."

"Yeah. —Know anything about his personal affairs?"

"Married. Coupla kids. Good professional rep. Lots of business. Sober as anybody. —He could afford an office in this building."

"Good Lord!" Render turned. "Have you got a case file there or something?"

"You know," she shrugged her thick shouldres, "I've got friends all over this hive. We always talk when things go slow. Prissy's my sister-in-law anyhow—"

"You mean that if I dived through this window right now, my current biography would make the rounds in the next five minutes?"

"Probably," she twisted her bright lips into a smile, "give or take a couple. But don't do it today, huh? —You know, it would be kind of anticlimactic, and it wouldn't get the same coverage as a solus.

"Anyhow," she continued, "you're a mind-mixer. You wouldn't do it."

"You're betting against statistics," he observed. "The medical profession, along with attorneys, manages about three times as many as most other work areas."

"Hey!" She looked worried. "Go 'way from my window!"

"I'd have to go to work for

Doctor Hanson then," she added, "and he's a slob."

He moved to her desk.

"I never know when to take you seriously," she decided.

"I appreciate your concern," he nodded, "indeed I do. As a matter of fact, I have never been statistic-prone—I should have reper-cussed out of the neuropy game four years ago."

"You'd be a headline, though," she mused. "All those reporters asking me about you . . . Hey, why do they do it, huh?"

"Who?"

"Anybody."

"How should I know, Bennie? I'm only a humble psyche-stirrer. If I could pinpoint a general underlying cause—and then maybe figure a way to anticipate the thing—why, it might even be better than my jumping, for newscopy. But I can't do it, because there is no single, simple reason—I don't think."

"Oh."

"About thirty-five years ago it was the ninth leading cause of death in the United States. Now it's number six for north and South America. I think it's seventh in Europe."

"And nobody will ever really know why Irizarry jumped?"

RENDER swung a chair backwards and seated himself. He knocked an ash into her petite and gleaming tray. She emptied

it into the waste-chute, hastily, and coughed a significant cough.

"Oh, one can always speculate," he said, "and one in my profession will. The first thing to consider would be the personality traits which might predispose a man to periods of depression. People who keep their emotions under rigid control, people who are conscientious and rather compulsively concerned with small matters . . ." He knocked another fleck of ash into her tray and watched as she reached out to dump it, then quickly drew her hand back again. He grinned an evil grin. "In short," he finished, "some of the characteristics of people in professions which require individual, rather than group performance—medicine, law, the arts."

She regarded him speculatively.

"Don't worry though," he chuckled, "I'm pleased as hell with life."

"You're kind of down in the mouth this morning."

"Pete called me. He broke his ankle yesterday in gym class. They ought to supervise those things more closely. I'm thinking of changing his school."

"Again?"

"Maybe. I'll see. The headmaster is going to call me this afternoon. I don't like to keep shuffling him, but I do want him to finish school in one piece."

"A kid can't grow up without an accident or two. It's—statistics."

"Statistics aren't the same thing as destiny, Bennie. Everybody makes his own."

"Statistics or destiny?"

"Both, I guess."

"I think that if something's going to happen, it's going to happen."

"I don't. I happen to think that the human will, backed by a sane mind can exercise some measure of control over events. If I didn't think so, I wouldn't be in the racket I'm in."

"The world's a machine—you know—cause, effect. Statistics do imply the prob—"

"The human mind is not a machine, and I do not know cause and effect. Nobody does."

"You have a degree in chemistry, as I recall. You're a scientist, Doc."

"So I'm a Trotskyite deviationist," he smiled, stretching, "and you were once a ballet teacher." He got to his feet and picked up his coat.

"By the way, Miss Deville called, left a message. She said: 'How about St. Moritz?'"

"Too ritzy," he decided aloud. "It's going to be Davos."

BECAUSE the suicide bothered him more than it should have, Render closed the door to his office and turned off the windows

and turned on the phonograph. He put on the desk light only.

How has the quality of human life been changed, he wrote, since the beginnings of the industrial revolution?

He picked up the paper and re-read the sentence. It was the topic he had been asked to discuss that coming Saturday. As was typical in such cases he did not know what to say because he had too much to say, and only an hour to say it in.

He got up and began to pace the office, now filled with Beethoven's Eighth Symphony.

"The power to hurt," he said, snapping on a lapel microphone and activating his recorder, "has evolved in a direct relationship to technological advancement." His imaginary audience grew quiet. He smiled. "Man's potential for working simple mayhem has been multiplied by mass-production; his capacity for injuring the psyche through personal contacts has expanded in an exact ratio to improved communication facilities. But these are all matters of common knowledge, and are not the things I wish to consider tonight. Rather, I should like to discuss what I choose to call autopsychomimesis—the self-generated anxiety complexes which on first scrutiny appear quite similar to classic patterns, but which actually represent radical dispersions of psychic en-

ergy. They are peculiar to our times. . . ."

He paused to dispose of his cigar and formulate his next words.

"Autopsychomimesis," he thought aloud, "a self-perpetuated imitation complex—almost an attention-getting affair. —A jazzman, for example, who acted hopped-up half the time, even though he had never used an addictive narcotic and only dimly remembered anyone who had—because all the stimulants and tranquilizers of today are quite benign. Like Quixote, he aspired after a legend when his music alone should have been sufficient outlet for his tensions.

"Or my Korean War Orphan, alive today by virtue of the Red Cross and UNICEF and foster parents whom he never met. He wanted a family so badly that he made one up. And what then?—He hated his imaginary father and he loved his imaginary mother quite dearly—for he was a highly intelligent boy, and he too longed after the half-true complexes of tradition. Why?

"Today, everyone is sophisticated enough to understand the time-honored patterns of psychic disturbance. Today, many of the reasons for those disturbances have been removed—not as radically as my now-adult war orphan's, but with as remarkable an effect. We are living in a neu-

rotic past. —Again, why? Because our present times are geared to physical health, security and well-being. We have abolished hunger; though the backwoods orphan would still rather receive a package of food concentrates from a human being who cares for him than to obtain a warm meal from an automat unit in the middle of the jungle.

"Physical welfare is now every man's right, in excess. The reaction to this has occurred in the area of mental health. Thanks to technology, the reasons for many of the old social problems have passed, and along with them went many of the reasons for psychic distress. But between the black of yesterday and the white of tomorrow is the great gray of today, filled with nostalgia and fear of the future, which cannot be expressed on a purely material plane, is now being represented by a willful seeking after historical anxiety-modes. . . ."

THE phone-box buzzed briefly. Render did not hear it over the Eighth.

"We are afraid of what we do not know," he continued, "and tomorrow is a very great unknown. My own specialized area of psychiatry did not even exist thirty years ago. Science is capable of advancing itself so rapidly now that there is a genuine public uneasiness—I might even say 'dis-

tress'—as to the logical outcome: the total mechanization of everything in the world. . . ."

He passed near the desk as the phone buzzed again. He switched off his microphone and softened the Eighth.

"Hello?"

"Saint Moritz," she said.

"Davos," he replied firmly.

"Charlie, you are most exasperating!"

"Jill, dear—so are you."

"Shall we discuss it tonight?"

"There is nothing to discuss!"

"You'll pick me up at five, though?"

He hesitated, then:

"Yes, at five. How come the screen is blank?"

"I've had my hair fixed. I'm going to surprise you again."

He suppressed an idiot chuckle, said, "Pleasantly, I hope. Okay, see you then," waited for her "good-bye," and broke the connection.

He transpired the windows, turned off the light on his desk, and looked outside.

Gray again overhead, and many slow flakes of snow—wandering, not being blown about much—moving downwards and then losing themselves in the tumult. . . .

He also saw, when he opened the window and leaned out, the place off to the left where Iri-zarry had left his next-to-last mark on the world.

He closed the window and listened to the rest of the symphony. It had been a week since he had gone blindspinning with Eileen. Her appointment was for one o'clock.

He remembered her fingertips brushing over his face, like leaves, or the bodies of insects, learning his appearance in the ancient manner of the blind. The memory was not altogether pleasant. He wondered why.

Far below, a patch of hosed pavement was blank once again; under a thin, fresh shroud of white, it was slippery as glass. A building custodian hurried outside and spread salt on it, before someone slipped and hurt himself

SIGMUND was the myth of Fenris come alive. After Render had instructed Mrs. Hedges, "Show them in," the door had begun to open, was suddenly pushed wider, and a pair of smoky-yellow eyes stared in at him. The eyes were set in a strangely misshapen dog-skull.

Sigmund's was not a low canine brow, slanting up slightly from the muzzle; it was a high, shaggy cranium, making the eyes appear even more deep-set than they actually were. Render shivered slightly at the size and aspect of that head. The muties he had seen had all been puppies. Sigmund was full grown, and his gray-black fur had a tendency to

bristle, which made him appear somewhat larger than a normal specimen of the breed.

He stared in at Render in a very un-doglike way and made a growling noise which sounded too much like, "Hello, doctor," to have been an accident.

Render nodded and stood.

"Hello, Sigmund," he said. "Come in."

The dog turned his head, sniffing the air of the room—as though deciding whether or not to trust his ward within its confines. Then he returned his stare to Render, dipped his head in an affirmative, and shouldered the door open. Perhaps the entire encounter had taken only one disconcerting second.

Eileen followed him, holding lightly to the double-leashed harness. The dog padded soundlessly across the thick rug—head low, as though he were stalking something. His eyes never left Render's.

"So this is Sigmund . . . ? How are you Eileen?"

"Fine. —Yes, he wanted very badly to come along, and I wanted you to meet him."

Render led her to a chair and seated her. She unsnapped the double guide from the dog's harness and placed it on the floor. Sigmund sat down beside it and continued to stare at Render.

"How is everything at State Psych?"

"Same as always. —May I bum a cigarette, doctor? I forgot mine."

He placed it between her fingers, furnished a light. She was wearing a dark blue suit and her glasses were flame blue. The silver spot on her forehead reflected the glow of his lighter; she continued to stare at that point in space after he had withdrawn his hand. Her shoulder-length hair appeared a trifle lighter than it had seemed on the night they met; today it was like a fresh-minted copper coin.

Render seated himself on the corner of his desk, drawing up his world-ashtray with his toe.

"You told me before that being blind did not mean that you had never seen. I didn't ask you to explain it then. But I'd like to ask you now."

"I had a neuroparticipation session with Doctor Riscomb," she told him, "before he had his accident. He wanted to accommodate my mind to visual impressions. Unfortunately, there was never a second session."

"I see. What did you do in that session?"

She crossed her ankles and Render noted they were well-turned.

"Colors, mostly. The experience was quite overwhelming."

"How well do you remember them? How long ago was it?"

"About six months ago—and I

shall never forget them. I have even dreamt in color patterns since then."

"How often?"

"Several times a week."

"What sort of associations do they carry?"

"Nothing special. They just come into my mind along with other stimuli now—in a pretty haphazard way."

"How?"

"Well, for instance, when you ask me a question it's a sort of yellowish-orangish pattern that I 'see'. Your greeting was a kind of silvery thing. Now that you're just sitting there listening to me, saying nothing, I associate you with a deep, almost violet, blue."

Sigmund shifted his gaze to the desk and stared at the side panel.

Can he hear the recorder spinning inside? wondered Render. *And if he can, can he guess what it is and what it's doing?*

If so, the dog would doubtless tell Eileen—not that she was unaware of what was now an accepted practice—and she might not like being reminded that he considered her case as therapy, rather than a mere mechanical adaptation process. If he thought it would do any good (he smiled inwardly at the notion), he would talk to the dog in private about it.

Inwardly, he shrugged.

"I'll construct a rather elementary fantasy world then," he said

finally, "and introduce you to some basic forms today."

She smiled; and Render looked down at the myth who crouched by her side, its tongue a piece of beefsteak hanging over a picket fence.

Is he smiling too?

"Thank you," she said.

Sigmund wagged his tail.

"Well then," Render disposed of his cigarette near Madagascar, "I'll fetch out the 'egg' now and test it. In the meantime," he pressed an unobtrusive button, "perhaps some music would prove relaxing."

She started to reply, but a Wagnerian overture snuffed out the words. Render jammed the button again, and there was a moment of silence during which he said, "Heh heh. Thought Respighi was next."

It took two more pushes for him to locate some Roman pines.

"You could have left him on," she observed. "I'm quite fond of Wagner."

"No thanks," he said, opening the closet, "I'd keep stepping in all those piles of leitmotifs."

THE great egg drifted out into the office, soundless as a cloud. Render heard a soft growl behind as he drew it toward the desk. He turned quickly.

Like the shadow of a bird, Sigmund had gotten to his feet, crossed the room, and was al-

ready circling the machine and sniffing at it—tail taut, ears flat, teeth bared.

"Easy, Sig," said Render. "It's an Omnichannel Neural T & R Unit. It won't bite or anything like that. It's just a machine, like a car, or a teevee, or a dishwasher. That's what we're going to use today to show Eileen what some things look like."

"Don't like it," rumbled the dog.

"Why?"

Sigmund had no reply, so he stalked back to Eileen and laid his head in her lap.

"Don't like it," he repeated, looking up at her.

"Why?"

"No words," he decided. "We go home now?"

"No," she answered him. "You're going to curl up in the corner and take a nap, and I'm going to curl up in that machine and do the same thing—sort of."

"No good," he said, tail drooping.

"Go on now," she pushed him, "lie down and behave yourself."

He acquiesced, but he whined when Render blanked the windows and touched the button which transformed his desk into the operator's seat.

He whined once more—when the egg, connected now to an outlet, broke in the middle and the top slid back and up, revealing the interior.

Render seated himself. His chair became a contour couch and moved in halfway beneath the console. He sat upright and it moved back again, becoming a chair. He touched a part of the desk and half the ceiling disengaged itself, reshaped itself, and lowered to hover overhead like a huge bell. He stood and moved around to the side of the ro-womb. Respighi spoke of pines and such, and Render disengaged an earphone from beneath the egg and leaned back across his desk. Blocking one ear with his shoulder and pressing the microphone to the other, he played upon the buttons with his free hand. Leagues of surf drowned the tone poem; miles of traffic overrode it; a great clanging bell sent fracture lines running through it; and the feedback said: ". . . Now that you are just sitting there listening to me, saying nothing, I associate you with a deep, almost violet, blue . . ."

He switched to the face mask and monitored, *one*—cinnamon, *two*—leaf mold, *three*—deep reptilian musk . . . and down through thirst, and the tastes of honey and vinegar and salt, and back on up through lilacs and wet concrete, a before-the-storm whiff of ozone, and all the basic olfactory and gustatory cues for morning, afternoon and evening in the town.

The couch floated normally in its pool of mercury, magnetically stabilized by the walls of the egg. He set the tapes.

The ro-womb was in perfect condition.

"Okay," said Render, turning, "everything checks."

SHE was just placing her glasses atop her folded garments. She had undressed while Render was testing the machine. He was perturbed by her narrow waist, her large, dark-pointed breasts, her long legs. She was too well-formed for a woman her height, he decided.

He realized though, as he stared at her, that his main annoyance was, of course, the fact that she was his patient.

"Ready here," she said, and he moved to her side.

He took her elbow and guided her to the machine. Her fingers explored its interior. As he helped her enter the unit, he saw that her eyes were a vivid sea-green. Of this, too, he disapproved.

"Comfortable?"

"Yes."

"Okay then, we're set. I'm going to close it now. Sweet dreams."

The upper shell dropped slowly. Closed, it grew opaque, then dazzling. Render was staring down at his own distorted reflection.

He moved back in the direction of his desk.

Sigmund was on his feet, blocking the way.

Render reached down to pat his head, but the dog jerked it aside.

"Take me, with," he growled.

"I'm afraid that can't be done, old fellow," said Render. "Besides, we're not really going anywhere. We'll just be dozing, right here, in this room."

The dog did not seem mollified.

"Why?"

Render sighed. An argument with a dog was about the most ludicrous thing he could imagine when sober.

"Sig," he said, "I'm trying to help her learn what things look like. You doubtless do a fine job guiding her around in this world which she cannot see—but she needs to know what it looks like now, and I'm going to show her."

"Then she, will not, need me."

"Of course she will." Render almost laughed. The pathetic thing was here bound so closely to the absurd thing that he could not help it. "I can't restore her sight," he explained. "I'm just going to transfer her some sight-abstractions—sort of lend her my eyes for a short time. Savvy?"

"No," said the dog. "Take mine."

Render turned off the music.

The whole mutie-master rela-

tionship might be worth six volumes, he decided, in German.

He pointed to the far corner.

"Lie down, over there, like Eileen told you. This isn't going to take long, and when it's all over you're going to leave the same way you came—you leading. Okay?"

Sigmund did not answer, but he turned and moved off to the corner, tail drooping again.

Render seated himself and lowered the hood, the operator's modified version of the ro-womb. He was alone before the ninety white buttons and the two red ones. The world ended in the blackness beyond the console. He loosened his necktie and unbuttoned his collar.

He removed the helmet from its receptacle and checked its leads. Donning it then, he swung the halfmask up over his lower face and dropped the darksheet down to meet with it. He rested his right arm in the sling, and with a single tapping gesture, he eliminated his patient's consciousness.

A Shaper does not press white buttons consciously. He wills conditions. Then deeply-implanted muscular reflexes exert an almost imperceptible pressure against the sensitive arm-sling, which glides into the proper position and encourages an extended finger to move forward. A button is pressed. The sling moves on.

Render felt a tingling at the base of his skull; he smelled fresh-cut grass.

Suddenly he was moving up the great gray alley between the worlds.

AFTER what seemed a long time, Render felt that he was footed on a strange Earth. He could see nothing; it was only a sense of presence that informed him he had arrived. It was the darkest of all the dark nights he had ever known.

He willed that the darkness disperse. Nothing happened.

A part of his mind came awake again, a part he had not realized was sleeping; he recalled whose world he had entered.

He listened for her presence. He heard fear and anticipation.

He willed color. First, red . . .

He felt a correspondence. Then there was an echo.

Everything became red; he inhabited the center of an infinite ruby.

Orange. Yellow . . .

He was caught in a piece of amber.

Green now, and he added the exhalations of a sultry sea. Blue, and the coolness of evening.

He stretched his mind then, producing all the colors at once. They came in great swirling plumes.

Then he tore them apart and forced a form upon them.

An incandescent rainbow arced across the black sky.

He fought for browns and grays below him. Self-luminiscent, they appeared—in shimmering, shifting patches.

Somewhere, a sense of awe. There was no trace of hysteria though, so he continued with the Shaping.

He managed a horizon, and the blackness drained away beyond it. The sky grew faintly blue, and he ventured a herd of dark clouds. There was resistance to his efforts at creating distance and depth, so he reinforced the tableau with a very faint sound of surf. A transference from an auditory concept of distance came on slowly then, as he pushed the clouds about. Quickly, he threw up a high forest to offset a rising wave of acrophobia.

The panic vanished.

Render focussed his attention on tall trees—oaks and pines, poplars and sycamores. He hurled them about like spears, in ragged arrays of greens and browns and yellows, unrolled a thick mat of morning-moist grass, dropped a series of gray boulders and greenish logs at irregular intervals, and tangled and twined the branches overhead, casting a uniform shade throughout the glen.

The effect was staggering. It seemed as if the entire world

was shaken with a sob, then silent.

Through the stillness he felt her presence. He had decided it would be best to lay the groundwork quickly, to set up a tangible headquarters, to prepare a field for operations. He could backtrack later, he could repair and amend the results of the trauma in the sessions yet to come; but this much, at least, was necessary for a beginning.

With a start, he realized that the silence was not a withdrawal. Eileen had made herself imminent in the trees and the grass, the stones and the bushes; she was personalizing their forms, relating them to tactile sensations, sounds, temperatures, aromas.

With a soft breeze, he stirred the branches of the trees. Just beyond the bounds of seeing he worked out the splashing sounds of a brook.

There was a feeling of joy. He shared it.

She was bearing it extremely well, so he decided to extend the scope of the exercise. He let his mind wander among the trees, experiencing a momentary doubling of vision, during which time he saw an enormous hand riding in an aluminum carriage toward a circle of white.

He was beside the brook now and he was seeking her, carefully.

He drifted with the water. He had not yet taken on a form. The splashes became a gurling as he pushed the brook through shallow places and over rocks. At his insistence, the waters became more articulate.

"Where are you?" asked the brook.

Here! Here!

Here!

. . . and *here!* replied the trees, the bushes, the stones, the grass.

"Choose one," said the brook, as it widened, rounded a mass of rock, then bent its way down a slope, heading toward a blue pool.

I cannot, was the answer from the wind.

"You must." The brook widened and poured itself into the pool, swirled about the surface, then stilled itself and reflected branches and dark clouds. "Now!"

Very well, echoed the wood, in a moment.

The mist rose above the lake and drifted to the bank of the pool.

"Now," tinkled the mist.

Here, then . . .

She had chosen a small willow. It swayed in the wind; it trailed its branches in the water.

"Eileen Shallot," he said, "regard the lake."

The breezes shifted; the willow bent.

IT was not difficult for him to recall her face, her body. The tree spun as though rootless. Eileen stood in the midst of a quiet explosion of leaves; she stared, frightened, into the deep blue mirror of Render's mind, the lake.

She covered her face with her hands, but it could not stop the seeing.

"Behold yourself," said Render.

She lowered her hands and peered downwards. Then she turned in every direction, slowly; she studied herself. Finally:

"I feel I am quite lovely," she said. "Do I feel so because you want me to, or is it true?"

She looked all about as she spoke, seeking the Shaper.

"It is true," said Render, from everywhere.

"Thank you."

There was a swirl of white and she was wearing a belted garment of damask. The light in the distance brightened almost imperceptibly. A faint touch of pink began at the base of the lowest cloudbank.

"What is happening there?" she asked, facing that direction.

"I am going to show you a sunrise," said Render, "and I shall probably botch it a bit—but then, it's my first professional sunrise under these circumstances."

"Where are *you*?" she asked.

"Everywhere," he replied.

"Please take on a form so that I can see you."

"All right."

"Your natural form."

He willed that he be beside her on the bank, and he was.

Startled by a metallic flash, he looked downward. The world receded for an instant, then grew stable once again. He laughed, and the laugh froze as he thought of something.

He was wearing the suit of armor which had stood beside their table in the Partridge and Scalpel on the night they met.

She reached out and touched it.

"The suit of armor by our table," she acknowledged, running her fingertips over the plates and the junctures. "I associated it with you that night."

". . . And you stuffed me into it just now," he commented. "You're a strong-willed woman."

The armor vanished and he was wearing his graybrown suit and looseknit bloodclot necktie and a professional expression.

"Behold the real me," he smiled faintly. "Now, to the sunset. I'm going to use all the colors. Watch!"

THEY seated themselves on the green park bench which had appeared behind them, and Render pointed in the direction he had decided upon as east.

Slowly, the sun worked through its morning attitudes. For the first time in this particular world it shown down like a god, and reflected off the lake, and broke the clouds, and set the landscape to smouldering beneath the mist that arose from the moist wood.

Watching, watching intently, staring directly into the ascending bonfire, Eileen did not move for a long while, nor speak. Render could sense her fascination.

She was staring at the source of all light; it reflected back from the gleaming coin on her brow, like a single drop of blood.

Render said, "That is the sun, and those are clouds," and he clapped his hands and the clouds covered the sun and there was a soft rumble overhead, "and that is thunder," he finished.

The rain fell then, shattering the lake and tickling their faces, making sharp striking sounds on the leaves, then soft tapping sounds, dripping down from the branches overhead, soaking their garments and plastering their hair, running down their necks and falling into their eyes, turning patches of brown earth to mud.

A splash of lightning covered the sky, and a second later there was another peal of thunder.

". . . And this is a summer storm," he lectured, "You see

how the rain affects the foliage, and ourselves. What you just saw in the sky before the thunderclap was lightning."

". . . Too much," she said. "Let up on it for a moment, please."

The rain stopped instantly and the sun broke through the clouds.

"I have the damndest desire for a cigarette," she said. "but I left mine in another world."

As she said it one appeared, already lighted, between her fingers.

"It's going to taste rather flat," said Render strangely.

He watched her for a moment, then:

"I didn't give you that cigarette," he noted. "You picked it from my mind."

The smoke laddered and spiraled upward, was swept away.

". . . Which means that, for the second time today, I have underestimated the pull of that vacuum in your mind—in the place where sight ought to be. You are assimilating these new impressions very rapidly. You're even going to the extent of groping after new ones. Be careful. Try to contain that impulse."

"It's like a hunger," she said.

"Perhaps we had best conclude this session now."

Their clothing was dry again. A bird began to sing.

"No, wait! Please! I'll be care-

ful. I want to see more things."

"There is always the next visit," said Render. "But I suppose we can manage one more. Is there something you want very badly to see?"

"Yes. Winter. Snow."

"Okay," smiled the Shaper, "then wrap yourself in that fur-piece . . ."

THE afternoon slipped by rapidly after the departure of his patient. Render was in a good mood. He felt emptied and filled again. He had come through the first trial without suffering any repercussions. He decided that he was going to succeed. His satisfaction was greater than his fear. It was with a sense of exhilaration that he returned to working on his speech.

". . . And what is the power to hurt?" he inquired of the microphone.

"We live by pleasure and we live by pain," he answered himself. "Either can frustrate and either can encourage. But while pleasure and pain are rooted in biology, they are conditioned by society: thus are values to be derived. Because of the enormous masses of humanity, hectically changing positions in space every day throughout the cities of the world, there has come into necessary being a series of totally inhuman controls upon these movements. Every day they nib-

ble their way into new areas—driving our cars, flying our planes, interviewing us, diagnosing our diseases—and I cannot even venture a moral judgment upon these intrusions. They have become necessary. Ultimately, they may prove salutary.

"The point I wish to make, however, is that we are often unaware of our own values. We cannot honestly tell what a thing means to us until it is removed from our life-situation. If an object of value ceases to exist, then the psychic energies which were bound up in it are released. We seek after new objects of value in which to invest this—mana, if you like, or libido, if you don't. And no one thing which has vanished during the past three or four or five decades was, in itself, massively significant; and no new thing which came into being during that time is massively malicious toward the people it has replaced or the people it in some manner controls. A society though, is made up of many things, and when these things are changed too rapidly the results are unpredictable. An intense study of mental illness is often quite revealing as to the nature of the stresses in the society where the illness was made. If anxiety-patterns fall into special groups and classes, then something of

the discontent of society can be learned from them. Karl Jung pointed out that when consciousness is repeatedly frustrated in a quest for values it will turn its search to the unconscious; failing there, it will proceed to quarry its way into the hypothetical collective unconscious. He noted, in the postwar analyses of ex-Nazis, that the longer they searched for something to erect from the ruins of their lives—having lived through a period of classical iconoclasm, and then seen their new ideals topple as well—the longer they searched, the further back they seemed to reach into the collective unconscious of their people. Their dreams themselves came to take on patterns out of the Teutonic mythos.

"This, in a much less dramatic sense, is happening today. There are historical periods when the group tendency for the mind to turn in upon itself, to turn back, is greater than at other times. We are living in such a period of Quixotism, in the original sense of the term. This is because the power to hurt, in our time, is the power to ignore, to baffle—and it is no longer the exclusive property of human beings—"

A buzz interrupted him then. He switched off the recorder, touched the phone-box.

"Charles Render speaking," he told it.

"This is Paul Charter," lisped the box. "I am headmaster at Dilling."

"Yes?"

The picture cleared. Render saw a man whose eyes were set close together beneath a high forehead. The forehead was heavily creased; the mouth twitched as it spoke.

"Well, I want to apologize again for what happened. It was a faulty piece of equipment that caused—"

"Can't you afford proper facilities? Your fees are high enough."

"It was a *new* piece of equipment. It was a factory defect—"

"Wasn't there anybody in charge of the class?"

"Yes, but—"

"Why didn't he inspect the equipment? Why wasn't he on hand to prevent the fall?"

"He *was* on hand, but it happened too fast for him to do anything. As for inspecting the equipment for factory defects, that isn't his job. Look, I'm very sorry. I'm quite fond of your boy. I can assure you nothing like this will ever happen again."

"You're right, there. But that's because I'm picking him up tomorrow morning and enrolling him in a school that exercises proper safety precautions."

Render ended the conversation with a flick of his finger.

After several minutes had

passed he stood and crossed the room to his small wall safe, which was partly masked, though not concealed, by a shelf of books. It took only a moment for him to open it and withdraw a jewel box containing a cheap necklace and a framed photograph of a man resembling himself, though somewhat younger, and a woman whose upswept hair was dark and whose chin was small, and two youngsters between them—the girl holding the baby in her arms and forcing her bright bored smile on ahead. Render always stared for only a few seconds on such occasions, fondling the necklace, and then he shut the box and locked it away again for many months.

* * *

Whump! Whump! went the bass. *Tchg-tchg-tchga-tchg*, the gourds.

The gelatins splayed reds, greens, blues, and godawful yellows about the amazing metal dancers.

HUMAN? asked the marquee.

ROBOTS? (immediately below).

COME SEE FOR YOURSELF! (across the bottom, cryptically).

So they did.

Render and Jill were sitting at a microscopic table, thankfully set back against a wall, beneath charcoal caricatures of personalities largely unknown (there be-

ing so many personalities among the subcultures of a city of 14 million people). Nose crinkled with pleasure, Jill stared at the present focal point of this particular subculture, occasionally raising her shoulders to ear level to add emphasis to a silent laugh or a small squeal, because the performers were just *too* human—the way the ebon robot ran his fingers along the silver robot's forearm as they parted and passed . . .

Render alternated his attention between Jill and the dancers and a wicked-looking decoction that resembled nothing so much as a small bucket of whisky sours strewn with seaweed (through which the Kraken might at any moment arise to drag some hapless ship down to its doom).

"Charlie, I think they're really people!"

Render disentangled his gaze from her hair and bouncing earrings.

He studied the dancers down on the floor, somewhat below the table area, surrounded by music.

There *could* be humans within those metal shells. If so, their dance was a thing of extreme skill. Though the manufacture of sufficiently light alloys was no problem, it would be some trick for a dancer to cavort so freely—and for so long a period of time, and with such effortless-seeming ease—within a head-to-toe suit

of armor, without so much as a grate or a click or a clank.

Soundless . . .

They glided like two gulls; the larger, the color of polished anthracite, and the other, like a moonbeam falling through a window upon a silk-wrapped manikin.

Even when they touched there was no sound—or if there was, it was wholly masked by the rhythms of the band.

Whump-whump! Tchga-tchg!

Render took another drink.

Slowly, it turned into an apache-dance. Render checked his watch. Too long for normal entertainers, he decided. They must be robots. As he looked up again the black robot hurled the silver robot perhaps ten feet and turned his back on her.

There was no sound of striking metal.

Wonder what a setup like that costs? he mused.

"Charlie! There was no sound! How do they do that?"

"Really?" asked Render.

The gelatins were yellow again, then red, then blue, then green.

"You'd think it would damage their mechanisms, wouldn't you?"

The white robot crawled back and the other swiveled his wrist around and around, a lighted cigarette between the fingers. There was laughter as he pressed it mechanically to his lipless

faceless face. The silver robot confronted him. He turned away again, dropped the cigarette, ground it out slowly, soundlessly, then suddenly turned back to his partner. Would he throw her again? No . . .

Slowly then, like the great-legged birds of the East, they recommenced their movement, slowly, and with many turnings away.

Something deep within Render was amused, but he was too far gone to ask it what was funny. So he went looking for the Kraken in the bottom of the glass instead.

JILL was clutching his bicep then, drawing his attention back to the floor.

As the spotlight tortured the spectrum, the black robot raised the silver one high above his head, slowly, slowly, and then commenced spinning with her in that position—arms outstretched, back arched, legs scissored—very slowly, at first. Then faster.

Suddenly they were whirling with an unbelievable speed, and the gelatins rotated faster and faster.

Render shook his head to clear it.

They were moving so rapidly that they *had* to fall—human or robot. But they didn't. They were a mandala. They were a gray-

form uniformity. Render looked down.

Then slowing, and slower, slower. Stopped.

The music stopped.

Blackness followed. Applause filled it.

When the lights came on again the two robots were standing statue-like, facing the audience. Very, very slowly, they bowed.

The applause increased.

Then they turned and were gone.

Then the music came on and the light was clear again. A babble of voices arose. Render slew the Kraken.

"What d'you think of that?" she asked him.

Render made his face serious and said: "Am I a man dreaming I am a robot, or a robot dreaming I am a man?" He grinned, then added: "I don't know."

She punched his shoulder gaily at that and he observed that she was drunk.

"I am not," she protested. "Not much, anyhow. Not as much as you."

"Still, I think you ought to see a doctor about it. Like me. Like now. Let's get out of here and go for a drive."

"Not yet, Charlie. I want to see them once more, huh? Please?"

"If I have another drink I won't be able to see that far."

"Then order a cup of coffee."

"Yaagh!"

"Then order a beer."

"I'll suffer without."

There were people on the dance floor now, but Render's feet felt like lead.

He lit a cigarette.

"So you had a dog talk to you today?"

"Yes. Something very disconcerting about that . . ."

"Was she pretty?"

"It was a boy dog. And boy, was he ugly!"

"Silly. I mean his mistress."

"You know I never discuss cases, Jill."

"You told me about her being blind and about the dog. All I want to know is if she's pretty."

"Well . . . Yes and no." He bumped her under the table and gestured vaguely. "Well, you know . . ."

"Same thing all the way around," she told the waiter who had appeared suddenly out of an adjacent pool of darkness, nodded, and vanished as abruptly.

"There go my good intentions," sighed Render. "See how you like being examined by a drunken sot, that's all I can say."

"You'll sober up fast, you always do. Hippocratics and all that."

He sniffed, glanced at his watch.

"I have to be in Connecticut tomorrow. Pulling Pete out of that damned school . . ."

She sighed, already tired of the subject.

"I think you worry too much about him. Any kid can bust an ankle. It's a part of growing up. I broke my wrist when I was seven. It was an accident. It's not the school's fault those things sometimes happen."

"Like hell," said Render, accepting his dark drink from the dark tray the dark man carried. "If they can't do a good job I'll find someone who can."

She shrugged.

"You're the boss. All I know is what I read in the papers.

"—And you're still set on Davos, even though you know you meet a better class of people at Saint Moritz?" she added.

"We're going there to ski, remember? I like the runs better at Davos."

"I can't score any tonight, can I?"

He squeezed her hand.

"You always score with me, honey."

And they drank their drinks and smoked their cigarettes and held their hands until the people left the dance floor and filed back to their microscopic tables, and the gelatins spun round and round, tinting clouds of smoke from hell to sunrise and back again, and the bass went *whump!*

Tchga-tchga!

"Oh, Charlie! Here they come again!"

THE sky was clear as crystal. The roads were clean. The snow had stopped.

Jill's breathing was the breathing of a sleeper. The S-7 arced across the bridges of the city. If Render sat very still he could convince himself that only his body was drunk; but whenever he moved his head the universe began to dance about him. As it did so, he imagined himself within a dream, and Shaper of it all.

For one instant this was true. He turned the big clock in the sky backward, smiling as he dozed. Another instant and he was awake again, and unsmiling.

The universe had taken revenge for his presumption. For one reknown moment with the helplessness which he had loved beyond helping, it had charged him the price of the lake-bottom vision once again; and as he had moved once more toward the wreck at the bottom of the world—like a swimmer, as unable to speak—he heard, from somewhere high over the Earth, and filtered down to him through the waters above the Earth, the howl of the Fenris Wolf as it prepared to devour the moon; and as this occurred, he knew that the sound was as like to the trump of a judgment as the lady by his side was unlike the moon. Every bit. In all ways. And he was afraid.

(Concluded next month)



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THE HANDYMAN

By LEO P. KELLEY

Illustrated by SCHELLING



Critics of the arts know that, for a writer or a painter or a musician, technical skill is not enough. Emotion, too, must be present. The question poignantly posed in this story is: Doesn't the same thing hold true for science?

THE day, July 17, 2031, began happily enough. Skylarks sang, flowers grew, dogs barked, bees buzzed.

Everywhere in the village was the hum and harmony of life. The handyman, Martin Larkin, and his wife, Anna, went about their everyday business pretending ignorance of the place the people called The Hive which thrust its ominous steel tower (a mile or more, some said) into the sky as if it meant to impale the sun smiling there.

"Take a look in the oven, dear, so the bread won't burn," said Anna.

He knew her tricks. She had caught him at it. Brooding again. She had never let a loaf burn in her life. But he did as he was told, playing the game, grateful to her. "It's just fine," he said, closing the oven door gently so the bread wouldn't fall. He glanced through the open window where curtains waved in the shy breeze. There was no one in sight. "Mrs. Carter's youngest is doing fine," he ventured.

Anna turned to look at him. At his raven's eyes behind the artificial windows of his spectacles, at the lines in his old skin that traced their patchwork of years, there, at his still-strong hands with the blue ridges of veins creeping along them. He did not look like a criminal, an outlaw. Anna Larkin looked love. It was a love measured not merely in years spent together but a love woven of moments sprinkled brightly here and there throughout their lives. Like the time he had brought her forget-me-nots because she had borne him a son. Like the time he had held her hands tightly when that young and only son had tossed in his damp sheets in the days before The Hive, dying of an unnamed disease about which he could do nothing. What was it he had said, Anna asked herself, drifting back to here and now. Oh, yes. Mrs. Carter's youngest was doing fine. Thanks to you, my dear, she thought. "He'd take a lot of killing, that one," Anna said, giving a little laugh.

Martin Larkin nodded in happy agreement and was about to say something when a soft knock sounded on the door of the cottage.

Martin opened the door to greet Ephraim Pillsbury standing in the already hot sun, hat in hand.

"Morning," Ephraim drawled.

Martin's eyes narrowed speculatively. His heart hurried. Ephraim was no close friend or frequent visitor. "Nice day, Ephraim. "Come in," Martin said cordially.

"Just stopped by to say the time of day is all," Ephraim said, worrying his hat. "Rain's coming. You can smell it. Miss Ross, she sends her best regards by me and says you could stop by if you've a mind to. Her wiring, Miss Ross says, is acting up again."

"Thank you, Ephraim," Martin said. "I'll come over and take a look."

Ephraim plopped his hat on his head, mumbled something about summer storms, and strode down the flagstone walk to the unpaved road that ambled past the cottage.

Martin closed the door, Anna was behind him. "This is the second time this week," she observed, uneasiness deepening her voice.

"The bread nearly done?" Martin asked calmly.

Anna, without another word, went to the oven and removed the loaves. When they had cooled, she cut a neat hole in one and inserted the tools of her husband's trade.

Martin, carrying the loaf in a basket covered with a sparkling white napkin, waved to his wife from the garden gate. She returned his wave, managed a smile, mouthed the words *Be careful, dear* and closed the door. She sat down in her rocker and picked up her knitting. Only the thin line of her lips betrayed her anxiety.

MISS ROSS was sitting up in bed. "Come in, Martin," she called to him. She patted the edge of the bed.

Martin sat down. "Anna sent along a fresh loaf of bread," he said.

"Oooohhh!" Miss Ross cooed.

"About that faulty wiring," Martin said softly.

"Here," Miss Ross whispered, touching her chest.

Martin took her wrist. They both listened but only Martin heard, through the receiver of his thick index finger, the perfectly regular beat of her blood. It was just as he had suspected. "Now, Laura," he began sternly.

Miss Ross proceeded to weep with gentility, smothering her small sobs in a linen handkerchief.

"Now, Laura, you know you are perfectly all right. You put me in a dangerous position. I might be caught. I might be—."

"But—," Laura Ross whined, turning puppy-pleading eyes on Martin. "I'm so alone!"

He sat with her for nearly an hour, telling her tales, telling her the gossip of the village that was of little interest to her now that her husband was in The Hive and might or might not come home again.

"Someone reported him," Laura Ross told Martin. "It wasn't serious. They said he had a mild stroke. The Medicorps came and took him." Tears again.

"They have the latest methods and the greatest skills," Martin stated honestly. "They have the almost limitless resources of their body banks. They utilize all the advantages of bioelectronics and they have computers that can positively diagnose any known disease within a matter of seconds. And their machines have an error probability, I'm told, of minus two point zero."

"But I want to see him!"

"I'm told," Martin continued relentlessly, "that it takes only a dozen or so meditechs to staff The Hive. They know best, Laura," he concluded weakly. Oh, do they? he wondered in the secret of his mind.

Martin reached into the loaf of bread, took out a tiny bottle

and selected a red pill. He gave it to Laura who took it as if it were a ruby. He got her a glass of water from the pump outside. She swallowed the pill, drank the water and brightened perceptibly.

Martin grinned all the way home. He couldn't help it. His stethoscope was as outdated as he was himself, his thermometer was getting cloudy and instead of tongue depressors he was forced to use a worn silver spoon. The black market in drugs and medical supplies that had once been such a flood had become, in recent years, a sluggish stream. The pill he had given Laura Ross had been nothing but sugar. But their visit had been full of friendship and a lonely woman, afraid in the dark in her bed at midnight, now felt a little better. Hurrah for the handyman, thought Martin wryly, still grinning.

AS he approached his cottage, Martin heard it. The keening of the copter's siren made him think of ghosts and things more awful than ghosts. He began to run. The siren split the air and his ears as the copter lifted and swooped away to The Hive. The road outside the cottage was empty. So was the cottage. There was a spot of blood on the kitchen table and a chair lying up-ended on the floor.

"Anna!" Martin cried. And again, louder, "Anna, answer me!"

But she couldn't and he knew it. Her heart, he thought. The Hive, he thought, with growing horror. He raced outside and the faces peering from the windows across the road and right next door were sympathetic and something else. Fearful.

He went back inside and sat down, telling himself that he was a rational man and that his wife was ill, seriously ill, and that she had been taken to The Hive where she would be cured. He would go to her. *You cannot*, an evil voice whispered truth in his brain. *I will*, he shouted silently, not quite drowning the voice. He splashed cold water on his face, slicked back his almost nonexistent hair and hurried as fast as his seventy-three-year-old legs would permit up the road toward The Hive.

Its steel tower, like a silver blade of grass, all gleaming metal and cleanliness, rose up before him as he approached. He shuddered, suddenly cold in the blazing sunlight.

He approached the immaculately uniformed guards at the main entrance, gave them his name, his address, his sick smile. They were polite as they punched this information into the computaphones on their belts. He knew it was being promptly re-

layed throughout The Hive's incredibly complex communication net. But they let him pass.

He walked down empty halls which he knew were designed only for such as him in just such a situation. While he wandered, his grief, the theory was, would lessen and normal concern for his own well-being would increase. He would become lost, then concerned, then alarmed, then panic-stricken in the empty corridors and then—. Then, on cue, a young, brash meditech would appear from nowhere, take his arm, whisper words without meaning and lead him like a patient ox, not to the heavy, falling hammer, but to something infinitely more deadly and insidious. The meditech would lead him *outside* The Hive. And he would be relieved to have escaped from those horribly empty corridors where no men walked and no women laughed. Sooner than dare the cold emptiness of the halls once again, he would wait at home until word came through the transitube to advise him that Patient Anna Larkin, female, married, was to be released on such and such a day. Or had died and been eliminated as required by the Sanitation Standard of the community.

"No!" he shouted. His denial beat back at him in endless echos from the uncaring walls.

He walked on, feeling fright-

ened, thinking, "Anna, Anna, Anna. Thinking, like a child reciting a limerick, I love you, I'll find you, I love you, I'll find you.

A DOOR—a portion of the wall—opened. A young man wearing the red and white uniform of the Medicorps stood there, reaching out to take Martin's arm. Martin gathered his strength, sent a swift prayer for forgiveness hurtling upward, and struck the youngster full in the face with both fists. The boy crumpled like an abandoned doll at Martin's feet. Before the door could slide noiselessly shut again, Martin was through it.

Beyond the door the corridors were also empty. Walls of glass rose on either side and there seemed to Martin to be no ceiling in sight. Cryptic markings were etched into the glass at regular intervals. Martin pushed his spectacles up on his nose, pressed his face against the thick glass and peered through the clear barrier.

He recoiled in horror from what he saw. Neatly stacked in layers lay the patients. Wires ran to their heads, feet, arms, eyes, or fingers. In some of the cubicles, blood (Martin guessed) flowed through plastic tubes into the veins of the patients. All the patients seemed conscious. Some stared back at him in vague wonder or surprise or mere idle

curiosity. Tranquilized, Martin thought.

Recovering himself, he remembered Anna. He despaired of ever finding her. Then he remembered the boy by the door. He ran back, ran nervous hands along the smooth wall, pressing. At last, the door slid open. He dragged the still unconscious meditech inside, stripped him of his uniform, stripped himself and donned the red and white uniform. He gently covered the boy with his own clothes and laid him in a corner.

He walked down the empty corridor. He walked back, searching for Anna. When the second meditech appeared, Martin started. But he regained his composure quickly, thinking *now!* "Anna Larkin, age sixty-six, heart seizure. Location?"

He held his breath. The meditech hesitated, clearly uncertain.

"You're wasting time!" Martin snapped, in what he hoped was a commanding tone. The meditech turned sharply to consult a table of figures on a panel at his left. "Level 124, cubicle 9h," the meditech said tonelessly.

"I want to see the patient."

The meditech pressed a portion of the wall and Martin gasped as the cubicles flowed past him behind the glass wall, level after level revolving before his eyes. Suddenly, they stopped. The

meditech did something to the panel and the rows of patients shifted slowly, silently to the side. Anna appeared at Martin's eye level as the movement abruptly halted.

"I must examine her," Martin stated flatly.

"The meditech said, 'Sir, the machines control—.'"

"Now!"

"Sir," the meditech protested, "I don't think—."

"That's right!" Martin interrupted. "You don't think. You do as you are told or I will report you!"

It worked. The meditech snapped open the glass wall separating them from Anna and drew her out, adjusting the metal platform on which she reclined.

"Thank you," Martin said curtly.

The meditech strode down the hall and with only a brief, backward glance, disappeared through the door from which he had come. Martin relaxed momentarily. He had been maneuvering every minute, hopping about like an agitated stork, trying to keep his own body between the meditech following his commands and the other one crumpled in a corner at the distant end of the hall. He leaned over the figure of his wife. "Anna?"

"Martin," came her voice, sighing like a distant breeze. "I hoped you would—could come."

"I'm here." His deft fingers felt for her pulse, he noted the lack of color in her cheeks, he listened to her shallow breathing.

"It's bad this time," Anna said matter-of-factly.

"You'll be fine."

"No, not this time."

How many attacks had Anna suffered, Martin asked himself. He knew of two earlier ones. "It's going to be fine, my dear," he said, cursing his voice for cracking.

"Yes, now that you're here. I felt—" Anna tried to smile. "I felt a little bit afraid with no one here." She tried to lift her hand.

Martin took it. The cable fastened to her chest vibrated gently. The equivalent, Martin realized, of hand massage. It *is* bad, he thought.

It was his last thought before Anna died, her hand still resting in his. Automatically and instantly, the cable went limp and was suddenly withdrawn back into the wall of the cubicle after having sealed its point of egress with a thin, blue film. Martin, tears blinding him, closed the amber eyes of the woman who had been his morning sun and evening star, his love, his only language and his life.

"Farewell, my dear," he sighed. He walked down the hall, through the door and out to stare up at

the evening sky now filled with thunderheads. The guards mechanically programmed the fact of his departure into their communiphones.

HE stumbled over the dozing boy when he tried to open the door of his cottage.

"It's me," the boy said sleepily. "It's me, Bobby Harrison. My sister sent me to—. Why—?"

Martin looked from the boy's startled eyes to the red and white uniform he was still wearing. He reassured the boy by patting his head.

"My sister needs a doc—, the handyman," the boy continued breathlessly. "She said to tell you she's adding to the house."

"Get away from me, boy. I'm tired. Get the meditechs. Call The Hive. They'll see to her."

"Please, sir. Marcie doesn't want to go to The Hive. She needs someone with her, she says, someone she knows, now that she's going to—."

"Add to the house," Martin concluded for the boy, recognizing the odd code that had developed among the people when they wanted to summon a doctor to treat their illnesses, deliver their children, or see them through the final door. In The Hive, they knew, there was no one to listen to their terror, no one to place a cool hand on a fevered forehead, no one to speak

of peace and an end to worry while the dread door opened and the call came through. There were only the marvelous, almost miraculous machines, and the meditechs who tended them in their spotless Control Center. Both were fine as far as they went. But when you were giving birth or dying, Martin was convinced, the machines and meditechs just didn't go quite far enough. Because they couldn't. Oh, the machines didn't tire and the meditechs never made computational errors but both lacked an essential something. Something only one human being, no matter how inadequate, could give to another. And so a doctor who refused to become part of The Hive, who knew nothing of electronics and found something obscene about body banks became a fugitive, an outlaw, a *handyman* with the avowed purpose of cheating The Hive.

"My sister," the boy was saying, pulling Martin's sleeve.

Martin sighed and let the boy lead him like a patient dog through the night to the cottage where all the lights burned.

He had only just begun. The basins of steaming water and the stacks of clean towels stood ready. He was leaning over Marcie, whispering words about the way of things and the wonderful part she was to play in it all, when they burst into the room.

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"Seize him!" the leader of the Medicorps Patrol snarled. "Primitive methods, foolish old man," the booted captain exclaimed in disgust as he surveyed the room.

"Doctor!" Marcie cried, pain flashing in her lovely eyes.

"Don't interfere now," Martin snapped. "Give me five minutes, ten at most. We want the same thing, you and I. Stand back!"

Surprisingly, they did, impressed despite themselves by this unusual sight so foreign to their experiences in The Hive.

"Now, Marcie," Martin said softly. "I'm here and you're here and let's get on with it together."

When it was over, one of the Patrol couldn't help himself. He exclaimed, "Well done, old man!" He added, "But it would have been neater in The Hive. Sterile environment, you know. And we have a computer that can predict the onset of labor, its probable duration and then Control Center signals—."

"Quiet!" Martin commanded.

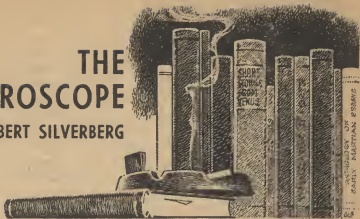
Everyone obeyed except the baby, a boy. It cried its greeting to the world.

Martin, before he gave the baby to Marcie and before they led him away to do to him whatever they felt they must do for the crime he had so obviously committed, bent and kissed the child. No machine, he thought with grim satisfaction, could have done that.

THE END

THE SPECTROSCOPE

By ROBERT SILVERBERG



A Pail of Air, by Fritz Leiber. 191 pages. Ballantine Books, 50¢.

Last month Fritz Leiber's massive and superb novel *The Wanderer* came under scrutiny here. In its wake comes this collection of eleven Leiber stories, all from magazines published between 1950 and 1962.

Leiber has been working in three separate genres in recent years. One Leiber facet, not represented at all in this collection, is his sword-and-sorcery output, notably the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser tales. (Overdue for book publication, by the way.) The book at hand is divided between the other two Leibers: Leiber-as-farceur and Leiber-as-somber-sociologist. Of the two, I infinitely prefer the latter, which makes the present collection rather a

failure for me, since it goes in heavily for farce. Such empty-headed stories as "Bread Overhead" and "The Last Letter" hardly deserved a first printing, let alone enshrinement in a collection like this. Others are just potboilers, neither irritating (like the aforementioned) nor memorable (like some of those below.) In this category fall "Time Fighter," "The Beat Cluster," and a couple of others.

But the fact that the book is ballasted with minor stories doesn't matter. Buy it anyway. Three of the stories appeared in *Galaxy* during that magazine's spectacular first year (1950-51), and they are powerful, grim, utterly unforgettable yarns of the kind that studded every issue of Horace Gold's shiny new baby

back then. There's "A Pail of Air," an after-the-bomb story that is just about perfect in doing what it sets out to do, and there is "Nice Girl with Five Husbands," less mordant but just as brilliant a story, and, lastly, there is "Coming Attraction," which in three or four thousand words sketches in the world of the near future with chilling power. I suppose the publishers could hardly have left the rest of the book blank, but they might just as well. Those three are worth the price of admission, and then some—particularly "Coming Attraction." If Leiber would only forget about those silly robots of his, and leave the gags to Jack Sharkey—!

The Day of the Triffids, by John Wyndham. 191 pages. Crest Books, 50¢.

I don't know how many incarnations this one has had, but here it is again from another paperback house. For those who came in late, this is the powerful novel with which John Wyndham's science fiction career began, fourteen years ago. A serial in *Colliers*, a successful book, a Hollywood movie—and for once a moneymaker that also happens to be an important book. Wyndham's technique is a familiar one by now, but it seemed new in 1951: dream up an utterly horri-

fying science-fiction situation (walking plants taking over the world, monsters coming out of the ocean, mutant babies with golden eyes, or what have you) and thrust it into the world of the realistic novel. The result, in John Wyndham's hands if not always in those of his imitators, is a novel of quiet, steadily gathering power.

H. G. Wells was doing it fifty years ago. Wyndham is the leading exponent of the technique these days. The repeated reprinting of *The Day of the Triffids* is testimony to its narrative appeal.

The Pirates of Venus and Lost on Venus, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. 340 pages. Dover Books, \$1.75.

At the Earth's Core, Pellucidar, and Tanar of Pellucidar, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. 433 pages. Dover Books, \$2.00.

A Princess of Mars and A Fighting Man of Mars, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. 356 pages. Dover Books, \$1.75.

Here's another man who's forever getting reprinted. I've said my piece about E.R.B.'s alleged literary abilities, and I don't intend to go into further denunciation here. There are those who adore Burroughs and those who—like me—stand mystified by his current vogue. The current batch presents seven Burroughs novels in three paperbacked vol-

umes, and are mentioned here strictly for the record.

I think all seven of these are available in cheaper paper editions. But the Dover ones are notable for their physical beauty: they're tall, sturdy, sumptuous books with stiff bindings and glossy covers, and the print is clear, the paper excellent in quality. Several of these volumes have interior illustrations, period-piece items from decades back. It seems a pity to waste such a magnificent production job on these silly pulp stories, but, anyway, here they are, three of the prettiest paperbacks anyone could imagine, and probably more to come in the same series. Burroughs fans, rejoice!

The World of Null-A, by A. E. van Vogt. 190 pages. Ace Books, 40¢.

And yet another book that refuses to die. A serial in *Astounding* in 1945, a hardcover book in 1948 at a time when science fiction in hard covers was a rarity, then one of the first of the Ace Double Books in 1953—and now back again as an Ace single. There must be something to it, yes?

There is. *The World of Null-A* is a silly book, full of loose ends, non-sequiturs of plot, blind alleys, and other instances of authorial carelessness. The definitive hatchet job was performed by

Damon Knight in a long essay called "Cosmic Jerrybuilder," reprinted in his critical collection, *In Search of Wonder* (Advent Books, 1956.) Knight showed, citing chapter and verse, exactly why this is a bad book.

But it's one of the best of bad books. I've read it four times, starting when I was a junior high school student to whom all s-f was equally wonderful. I find that the loose ends don't matter a bit. The book is a gorgeous maze of foolish adventures, of plots and counterplots that don't quite mesh, of curious prose that often reads as if an alien mind dictated it while holding van Vogt prisoner. The story may make no sense, but van Vogt hurls the reader into a dizzying world of the future and keeps him there from start to finish, and the journey is worth taking. Sometimes a book has values that transcend mere flaws of plotting, and this is certainly one. Let yourself be carried along by its sweeping drive, and save the nit-picking for another time.

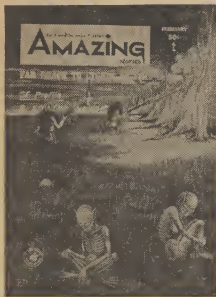
Pilgrimage to Earth, by Robert Shekley. 167 pages. Bantam Books, 50¢.

Since this month's column has dealt mostly with reissues, we can round it off with this one—third time around for this package of fifteen short stories, most of them from *Galaxy*. The book

was first published in 1957, by which time Sheckley had been writing science fiction for five or six years and had had a couple of previous collections out. This one illustrates the perils of professionalism. Sheckley's first collection, "Untouched by Human Hands," came out right at the start of his career, when he was methodically re-examining every idea in the s-f repertoire and standing it on its head with memorable results. The stories in that first collection were often rough and inexperienced in handling, but unfailingly brilliant in theme. Here, the technique is masterly, and every story is bur-nished to mirror gloss—but

there often isn't much beneath that flawless surface.

Still, the book makes light and lively reading, and many of the stories are worth re-reading. I particularly liked "Earth, Air, Fire, and Water," a wry little bit about the "most expensive space-suit man had ever devised;" "Bad Medicine," which is a screwball yarn in the best Kuttner-Lewis Padgett manner; and the title yarn, from *Playboy*. But there isn't a story in the book that isn't clever, deft, economical, and diverting. Maybe that's the trouble: there are too many clever, deft, economical, and diverting little stories in one volume.



COMING NEXT MONTH

A mind drug . . . a weird company under its influence . . . a black panther stalking a hilltop—and all is illusion, or else it is not. In the February **AMAZING** **Fritz Leiber** spins a web of science wonder in his nov-elet, Far Reach to Cygnus.

Also in next month's issue—the concluding instal-ment of **Roger Zelazny's** short novel, He Who Shapes; **Sam Moskowitz's** Profile on the great but little-known master of science-fiction, **S. Fowler Wright**; other stories, and all our usual features.

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